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MICHAEL J. SQUIRE

ΑΣΠΙΣ ΑΧΗΙΛΛΗΟΣ ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΣ ΚΑΘ' ΟΜΗΡΟΝ  
AN EARLY IMPERIAL TEXT OF *IL*. 18.483–557

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AN EARLY IMPERIAL TEXT OF *IL*. 18.483–557\*

For E.W.H.

In a corner of the Sala delle Colombe in Rome's Musei Capitolini lies a most amazing miniature object [Fig. 1].<sup>1</sup> A Greek inscription provides a concise hexameter title: ἀσπίς Ἀχιλλῆος Θεοδώρου καθ' Ὅμηρον, 'Achillean shield, Theodorean after Homer'.<sup>2</sup> This circular marble relief, in other words, takes the Homeric ecphrasis of the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18 and turns the text back into material object. The ecphrastic project of bringing around 'seeing' through 'hearing' is materialised for us to view: here, to have and to hold, is a literal artistic representation crafted after the literary artistic representation of the Homeric 'original'.<sup>3</sup>

I have written elsewhere about the ontological complexities of this object – its games not only with image and text, but also with the vicissitudes of scale.<sup>4</sup> In this article, my objective is instead to present and discuss the inscription around the tablet's rim. At the place where Homer situates the 'great might of River Ocean' (*Il.* 18.607–8), we find a virtuoso feat of epigraphic *technê*: the entire text of the Homeric description, written out from beginning to end (*Il.* 18.483–?608). The inverted ecphrasis is inverted anew: this inscribed text is a *verbal* representation of a *visual* representation of a *verbal* representation of the *visual* representations of (and indeed in) the shield. All this, moreover, within the sloping 2 cm band of a circular object measuring a mere 17.8 cm across [Fig. 2]. Given the size of this text, with its letters less than 1 mm high, the difficulties of reading go hand in hand with the ecphrastic paradox of seeing: where Homer tantalised his readers with the promise and failure of actually viewing the intermedial shield (ἴδεται, v. 467), this 'iconotext' teases its viewers with writing that can be seen, but barely read.<sup>5</sup>

Whatever one makes of my broader interpretation of the make-believe shield, the inscribed *grammata* deserve wider renown in their own written right. Despite some introductory comments by Raffaele Garrucci in 1882 and by Paolo Bienkowski in 1891, there is no reliable transcription of the text;<sup>6</sup> this has led to a number of errors in both interpretation and fact.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the tablet has received very little attention of any

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<sup>1</sup> Sala delle Colombe 83a. The most detailed analysis remains Bienkowski 1891; there is an earlier mention in the report of a lecture by Joseph Gatti at the Accademia Romana Pontificia di Archeologia on 25th May 1882 (cf. *MÉFRA* 2: 397–9), and a brief discussion by Garrucci 1882. Subsequent analyses include Stuart Jones 1912: 172–5, no. 83a; Lippold 1932: 1889; Sadurska 1964: 43–6; Fittschen 1973: 3; Guarducci 1974: 430–2; Hardie 1985: 20–1; Amedick 1999: esp. 159–69; Valenzuela Montenegro 2004: 239–49 (with further references collected at 239); Pasquariello 2004: 113–15; Bottini and Torelli (eds.) 2006: 244–5, no. 55; Petrain 2010: 54–6; Squire 2011b: 303–70 (with the summary of other discussions at *ibid.* 391–3).

<sup>2</sup> The reconstruction of the obverse inscription is uncertain (see below, pp. 3–4), but the text inscribed on the reverse [Figs. 3–4] is beyond reproach.

<sup>3</sup> For an introduction to underlying Graeco-Roman ideas about ecphrasis, see Elsner 2002, with more recent bibliography in Squire 2009: 139–46. The most important ancient testimonia (by Theon, 'Hermogenes', Aphthonius and Nikolaus) are collected in Webb 2009: 197–211.

<sup>4</sup> Squire 2011b: 303–70. More generally on the reception of the Homeric description, and its relation to ancient ideas about ecphrasis, compare Squire forthcoming a.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Squire 2011b: 360–7, and compare Squire 2010b: 332–9. I take the term 'iconotext' from Wagner 1995; for the underlying ideas of 'ecphrastic hope', 'ecphrastic fear', and 'ecphrastic indifference', see Mitchell 1994: 151–81.

<sup>6</sup> For previous discussions of the text, see below, n. 30.

<sup>7</sup> The variants noted in the 'Online Homer Multitext Project' are based on Bienkowski's observations (<http://www.stoa.org/homer/homer.pl>, after typing p276 in the 'witness' field; accessed July 2011). But errors result from the lack of transcrip-

sort whatsoever.<sup>8</sup> That an object as important as this could have been left so long to languish bears witness to the academic partitions of the academy: such are the residual divisions between Classical Philology and Classical Archaeology that so wondrous a relief can still slip between the subdisciplinary cracks.<sup>9</sup>

### Words to images

Before turning to the inscription, allow me to introduce the little object at large. The relief was found in or shortly before 1882, within a mediaeval wall near the Basilica di Santa Maria della Vittoria on the Via Venti Settembre in Rome.<sup>10</sup> Our ‘Achilleian shield’ was evidently recycled, and this explains both its damaged surface and its fragmentary state, whereby the right-hand side of the shield has been lost. In the absence of isotopic analysis, the material has been variously identified: although Anna Sadurska labels it ‘pierre rouge Porta Santa’, an orangey-pinkish hue of giallo antico seems much more likely.<sup>11</sup> At any rate, this was clearly an expensive stone, albeit one that did not lend itself to such detailed miniature craftsmanship.

As for size and mass, we have already measured the diameter at 17.8 cm, and the fragment weighs just 1.29 kg. Although around a third of the circular tablet is missing, the original object cannot have weighed more than c. 2 kg (under 4.5 pounds). The shield relief could be passed around a room with ease, approximating the weight of a small notebook computer [Fig. 2]. In my view, this was the most likely context for viewing the tablet: there is no evidence that it was hung on a wall or mounted in a display case.<sup>12</sup>

The ‘Theodorean’ attribution contextualises the relief within a larger group of early Imperial objects: the so-called *Tabulae Iliacae*, or Iliac tablets.<sup>13</sup> Of the 22 objects conventionally grouped together under this moniker, a total of six extant fragments associate themselves with similar ‘Theodorean’ craftsmanship.<sup>14</sup> One such *Tabula* offers an even closer parallel to our ἀσπίς Ἀχιλλῆος relief: displayed in the same

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tion. Some of the supposed variants are mistaken (e.g. at vv. 510, 523 and 531 – a verse lost in its entirety), others are omitted (e.g. v. 504), and still others that are listed are dubious (e.g. vv. 508, 513). The absence of transcription has caused even the most diligent of scholars to err, as when Petrain 2010: 55 claims of the inscription that ‘only 531 and 532 have been entirely effaced’ (omitting reference to v. 528).

<sup>8</sup> The few who have paid attention to the object, moreover, have been venomously critical: Fittschen 1973: 3 talks of a compositional ‘naivety’ (‘umgeben von den Tierkreiszeichen werden die Schildszenen auf ganz naive Weise in horizontal gegliederten Streifen geschildert’), and Bottini and Torelli (eds.) 2006: 245 supposes a ‘rapida realizzazione del rilievo’, discussing its ‘mancanza di proporzioni’. No less damning is Stansbury-O’Donnell 1995: 316: ‘the artist has abandoned the circular arrangement of scenes described in the *Iliad* in favour of a simplified, abridged and friezelike composition, which may improve legibility on this scale but hardly does justice to the original description’. In each case, critics have mistakenly assumed that there is some sort of ‘correct’ Homeric original that our object fails ‘accurately’ to reproduce: needless to say, this is not how ecphrasis works.

<sup>9</sup> For the larger polemic, see Squire 2011b: 371–84, esp. 377–81. The problem is associated with another disciplinary difficulty when it comes to Greek and Latin epigraphy, whereby archaeological spoils are divided among ‘textual’ and ‘material’ camps. Von Hesberg 2009: 20 nicely captures the point: ‘Die tatsächliche Forschungssituation ist überdies durch unterschiedliche Interessen der einzelnen beteiligten Disziplinen geprägt. In der Archäologie richtet sich das Interesse primär auf die Monumente und weniger auf die Inschriften, in der Epigraphik naturgemäß eher auf die Texte und weniger auf ihre Träger.’

<sup>10</sup> On the discovery and donation to the Musei Capitolini, see Bienkowski 1891: 183–4.

<sup>11</sup> Sadurska 1964: 43, with Squire 2011b: 305 n. 3; cf. Bienkowski 1891: 185; Lippold 1932: 1889; Amedick 1999: 159 n. 17; Valenzuela Montenegro 2004: 239. For the added significance of the marmoreal medium, cf. Squire 2011b: 254–5.

<sup>12</sup> Pace e.g. Sadurska 1964: 46: ‘L’état de conservation de la table N, et particulièrement la ligne de cassure qui passe par le milieu supérieur du pourtour du bouclier, semblent indiquer que la table N était une sorte d’oscille. On pouvait avoir percé un trou à cet endroit, pour y passer une ficelle permettant de suspendre l’objet entre les colonnes d’une péristyle ou aux branches d’un arbre.’ There is no such hole on our relief, and its size and weight accord with those of other similar ‘Theodorean’ tablets.

<sup>13</sup> For some earlier comments in this journal, see Squire 2011a. There are three major catalogues: Jahn 1873 (published before the discovery of the shield tablet), Sadurska 1964, and Valenzuela Montenegro 2004; although not strictly a catalogue (cf. Squire 2011b: 19–21), my own book provides an indexed ‘curtain call’ (387–416). For the weights and dimensions of other tablets, see Squire 2011b: 31–2, 67–70, supplemented by idem 2011a: 69–70. Here, as elsewhere, I have followed Sadurska’s system of naming tablets by both number and letter (cf. *IGUR* 4: 93–8, nos. 1612–33), whereby the *Tabula* discussed in this article is known as tablet 4N; for a possible twenty-third tablet, see Gasparri 2009 (with response in Squire 2011b: 413–16).

<sup>14</sup> The name occurs on tablets 1A, 2NY, 3C, 4N, 5O, 20Par: on the possible significance of the ‘Theodorean’ attribution and its puzzling adjectival form, see Squire 2010a: 84–90 and idem 2011b: 283–302. In the context of the armour forged for Achilles – the ultimate θεοῦ... δῶρα (*Il.* 19.18) – the ‘Theodorean’ attribution has an additional significance besides: it as though the poet were prefiguring this god-given tablet, or indeed that ‘Mr God’s Gift’ were prefiguring the Homeric shield (Squire 2011b: 367–70).

case within the Musei Capitolini, this second object likewise claims to represent the ‘Achilleian shield’ on its inscribed verso, while also boasting of its underlying ‘Theodorean craftsmanship’ (Θεοδώρηος ἡ τέχνη).<sup>15</sup>

Additional similarities between our tablet and other *Tabulae Iliacae* confirm that it was but one (albeit unique) example of a much larger corpus; this in turn helps to secure a date in the late first century BC or early first century AD.<sup>16</sup> Quite apart from iconographic similarities,<sup>17</sup> an intriguing inscriptional mode on the verso of our ‘Achilleian shield’ finds six comparanda among other *Tabulae*.<sup>18</sup> Like the text bisecting the recto, the inscribed verso provides a title, describing the shield as at once ‘Achilleian’ and ‘Theodorean’, while also signalling the debt (or challenge?) to Homer: ὅσπινς Ἀχιλλῆος Θεοδώρηος καθ’ Ὅμηρον.<sup>19</sup> But this is no ordinary inscription. Rather than being laid out in linear literal sequence, the inscribed letters are arranged in so-called ‘magic square’ format, whereby each letter occupies a series of single boxes within a multisided grid: beginning with the *alpha* in the middle, one can proceed in whichever way one likes – up, down, left or right [Figs. 3–4]. As long as readers make their way from the central *alpha* to one of the outer corners, the text holds fast.<sup>20</sup> In this particular example, the ‘square’ appearance of other ‘magic square’ inscriptions has been trumped by the arrangement of the letters into a make-believe altar, complete with 52 sides (and 614 internal squares). There are literary parallels for such games with the viscosity of writing and verbiage of pictures, and we know of three so-called *technopaegnia* (two in Greek, one in Latin) which toy with the conceit in related altar form.<sup>21</sup> That our artist is concerned with similar themes is confirmed by the additional inscription beneath the ‘magic square’ altar. This text – *IEPEIAIEPEI* – functions both as a palindrome and as a make-believe dedicatory inscription pictured on and in the altar: our ‘god-given’ Theodorean artist offers his labour to the divine poetry of Homer.<sup>22</sup>

Turn the ὅσπινς Ἀχιλλῆος object over once more, and we find at least the first half of the verso’s titular text repeated, this time emblazoned across the centre of the recto [Fig. 5]. The final letters are missing, leading to two different reconstructions: some scholars posit that the recto repeated the verso *verbatim* (ὅσπινς Ἀχιλλῆος Θεοδώρηος καθ’ Ὅμηρον), others that it offered a slight variation (closer, perhaps, to the text

<sup>15</sup> Sala delle Colombe 83b (= tablet 50). The text of the verso, laid out in polygonal ‘magic square’ formation (see below), evidently read [ὅσπινς] Ἀχιλλῆος Θεοδώρηος ἡ τέχνη. For discussion, see Bienkowski 1891: 199; Stuart Jones 1912: 175–6, no. 83b; Sadurska 1964: 46–7; Amedick 1999: 180–2; Valenzuela Montenegro 2004: 250–1 (with further bibliography collected at p. 250); further references are indexed in Squire 2011b: 395–6. Despite some wild speculations about the monumental scale of this tablet, it was probably only two-and-a-half times the size of the one examined in this article (Squire 2011b: 305–7), and its composition was also clearly related (ibid. 324). The shield of Achilles likewise recurs as a motif on tablet 6B, and possibly on 13Ta, as well as in the relevant Iliadic friezes on fragments 1A and 2NY.

<sup>16</sup> On the dating of the *Tabulae Iliacae*, see Squire 2011b: 58–63.

<sup>17</sup> Most important is the bird’s eye view of the city in the upper left-hand section, which corresponds with the so-called ‘mixed’ and ‘central perspectives’ of the cityscapes on tablets 1A, 2NY, 3C, 6B, 7Ti, 8E and 9D: cf. Leach 1988: 81–4; Mikocki 1990: 112–6; Valenzuela Montenegro 2004: 23–5, 248–9; Squire 2011b: 158–9, 313–14.

<sup>18</sup> On the broader significance of these verso inscriptions (found on tablets 2NY, 3C, 4N, 5O, 7Ti, 15Ber and 20Par), and their Hellenistic literary context, see Squire 2011b: 197–246.

<sup>19</sup> On the use of Ἀχιλλῆος as a dual-termination adjective (not a genitive singular noun), along with parallels, see Bienkowski 1891: 205 and Squire 2011b: 208 n.22.

<sup>20</sup> At least two tablets (2NY and 3C) were inscribed with an additional hexameter which explained the principle explicitly. Depending on the reconstruction, the instruction was to grasp/look at the middle letter and glide/continue with whichever you choose (γράμμα μέσον καθ[ελὼν παρολίσθη]νε οὐ βούλει, Bua 1971: 6–9; γράμμα μέσον καθ[ορὼν παραλάμβαν]ε οὐ βούλει, Gallavotti 1989: 49).

<sup>21</sup> For the altar *technopaegnia*, see AP 15.25–26 and Optatian Porphyry 26 (Polara). The most important analysis is now Luz 2010: 327–53 (developed from eadem 2008); cf. Squire 2011b: 216–43, esp. 230–5, along with Squire 2010c: esp. 88–9 on the epigrammatic literary context. It should be noted here that the verso of Gasparri’s supposed twenty-third tablet contains a related grid, which appears to mirror the stepped-altar pattern on the reverse of our tablet (Squire 2011b: 415).

<sup>22</sup> The words are usually transliterated as *ἱερεῖα ἱερεῖ* (‘the priestess to the priest’, following Garrucci 1882: 478 and Bienkowski 1891: 201), although Gallavotti 1989: 51 n. 7 suggests a parallel reading of *ἱερεῖα ἐρεῖ* – i.e. ‘[the Achilleian shield] will speak to the priestess’ (for the ‘speaking’ shield of Achilles, compare e.g. AP 9.116; the difficulty is that, as we shall see, the tablet elsewhere omits iota subscripts, although that need not rule out the interpretation). Puzzlingly, scholars have overlooked what seems to me a more obvious reading, namely *ἱερεῖα ἱερεῖ* (*ἱερεῖα* as neuter plural): ‘Theodorus’ dedicates his ‘god-given’ sacrificial stuff to the high priest of the *Iliad*.

on the verso text of tablet 5O: ἄσπις Ἀχιλλῆος Θεοδώρ[ηος ἢ τέχνη]). A final decision is impossible, although the spacing possibly suggests in favour of the first restoration: 31 letters would fit the surviving proportions better than 28.

Whatever the verbal content of the inscription, its visual function was to partition the composition into two horizontal halves. This is not the place for a full iconographic analysis. But it is necessary to recognise the symmetrical layout of the whole. And for that a brief description is required.<sup>23</sup>

I begin with the reliefs in the central circular field. In the upper part of the shield, above the horizontal inscription, were displayed the city of peace and the city of war, as described in *Il.* 18.490–540: although only the rounded walls of the first city survive (to the upper left of the extant fragment), Homer's figurative juxtaposition of the two cities must have been literalised here, so that the second city occupied the right-hand section of the upper frieze. Below the central inscription we find the ecphrasis' subsequent scenes – the various vignettes of ploughing (vv. 541–49), harvesting (vv. 550–60), gathering the grapes (vv. 561–72), herding (vv. 573–86), pasturing (vv. 587–89) and dancing (vv. 590–606). Something interesting happens in the arrangement. In this lower section, the balanced symmetry of the upper frieze has been replaced [Fig. 6]: comparing image with text, we see that the Homeric scenes begin at the field's lower centre (with the three cattle-led wagons proceeding in clockwise order), so that the pictures then zigzag first from right to left, then left to right, and then right to left once more before we reach the circling dance at the centre (underneath the pivotal omega of the Theodorean name). Whatever else we make of the shield, much care has gone into its pictorial composition. Observe, for example, how the artist has paid heed to the textual proportions of the original: the distribution of pictorial space between the upper and lower sections roughly mirrors the literary lengths of the description, whereby the upper part deals with 51 lines, just as the lower part treats some 66.

As for the cosmic frame of the Homeric description, this is rendered outside the central circular space [Fig. 7]. The artist takes full advantage of the shield's three-dimensional form, rendering the 'tireless Sun' (ἥελίον τ' ἀκάμαντα) and 'Moon at her full' (σελήνην τε πλήθουσσαν, v. 484) in two symmetrical polar metopes amid the tablet's sloping rim [Fig. 5]: Helios (above) and Selene (below) spin a static circular orbit around the object [cf. Figs. 10, 18].<sup>24</sup> A third oblique band stretches between the outer rim and the inner circle, and it was here that the artist found room to symbolise the astrological constellations – the Pleiades, Hyades, Orion and Bear described at vv. 486–8. There is evidently space for six Zodiacal emblems on the extant relief (although there are only the slightest traces today); the proportions confirm that there was originally room for 12 such reliefs around the object as a whole [Figs. 5, 7]. Such recourse to astronomy to explain the allegorical significance of the shield has a Hellenistic scholarly pedigree, reaching back to at least Crates in the second century BC; comparison can also be made with Pompeian frescoes depicting the forging of Achilles' shield, some of which depicted the shield with Zodiacal signs around its rim.<sup>25</sup>

#### Images to words

This is a brief description. But it suffices to demonstrate that every verbal scene finds its visual counterpart on the shield. This is also true of the image of Ocean, with which Homer opens and closes, locating the Ocean around the shield's outer frame (vv. 403, 607–8). On first impressions, we might think that this detail had been forgotten: around the tablet's rim, after all, are the two personifications of Helios and Selene. But then, slowly, we notice something else: the undulating marks of an inscribed text [Figs. 8–19].

<sup>23</sup> On the iconography, see Squire 2011b: 311–24, with further references.

<sup>24</sup> For a related image of the cyclical sun, within a description of a painted picture featuring the Homeric (description of the) shield of Achilles, see Phil. Min. *Imag.* 10.5: ὁρᾷς που τὸν τε τοῦ ἡλίου κύκλον, ὡς ἀκάμας ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ τὸ τῆς πανσελήνου φαιδρόν.

<sup>25</sup> Parallels can be found in the paintings from the Domus Ubani (also known as the Casa di Achille, Pompeii IX.5.2 = *PPM* 9: 394–5, nos. 52–3) and Casa di Sirico (Pompeii VII.1.25 = *PPM* 6: 279, no. 95): cf. Hardie 1985: 19; Gury 1986: 432–8; Balensiefen 1990: 56–59; Gundel 1992: 108–9, 224, no. 56; Taylor 2008: 152–8. Bienkowski 1891 claimed to detect the remains of a 'Capricorn' and 'Scorpio' on our tablet (186, 197), although very little can be seen today (cf. Amedick 1999: 193 n. 141). Such zodiacal signs were independently recognised on the Achillean shield depicted above the *Ilioupersis* scenes on the lost *Tabula Sarti* (tablet 6B: see Jahn 1873: 20–1; cf. Fittschen 1973: 2 n. 5). On the underlying allegorical critical tradition, see the excellent discussion of Hardie 1986: 340–3.

In one sense, of course, the squiggles themselves comprise an ornamental sort of sea. With an object as learned as this one, the gesture of situating the flowing Homeric text precisely where the Homer poet had situated the Ocean can hardly have been accidental. Ancient critical theory had long characterised Homer as metaphorical Ocean – the source to and from which all knowledge and creativity flow.<sup>26</sup> How fitting, then, to symbolise the visual figure of Ocean through the verbal monument of the Homeric text: the great Homer becomes both literal *and* metaphorical fountainhead, albeit within this tiny confined space.<sup>27</sup>

As for the text itself, the remains of six columns can be seen, varying from 2.0 to 2.4 cm in width (the height of each column is a fixed 2 cm). The text begins in the upper left-hand section (11 o'clock), to the left of Helios [Fig. 10], and then proceeds anticlockwise, as can clearly be seen in my reconstruction drawing [Fig. 11]. Each column is inscribed with between 10 and 15 verses, so that the remnants of 75 lines survive in total, dealing collectively with vv. 483–557: the first column has 10 verses (vv. 483–92: Fig. 12), the second 12 (vv. 493–504: Fig. 13), the third 15 (vv. 505–19: Fig. 14), the fourth and fifth both have 13 (vv. 520–32: Fig. 15; vv. 533–545: Figs. 16–17), and the sixth has 12 (vv. 546–57: Figs. 18–19). There is therefore no lacuna in the text, despite the usual insinuation that verses 520–32 are missing. This mistake is attributable to Bienkowski, whose initial description of the text omitted reference to a fifth column, labelling the fifth column as the fourth.<sup>28</sup> It has been followed – erroneously – ever since.<sup>29</sup>

Before transcribing the inscription, I should say something about how I arrived at it. No previous discussion proved reliable: Garrucci's preliminary attempt at transcription contains so many errors as to be unusable (as Bienkowski himself noted);<sup>30</sup> in attempting to rectify the situation, Bienkowski provided a series of comments and corrections instead of a new text (and by no means are all of these reliable either). Because of the difficulties of reading the miniature letters against the variegated veins of the marble [compare e.g. Figs. 16–17], I have worked from a plaster cast in Göttingen, although I was able to check readings against the original tablet in Rome.<sup>31</sup> The Göttingen cast was commissioned in 1997, and is of superlative quality. Even using this cast, though, I would not have been able to decipher the text without bright light and a magnifying glass; the wonders of digital photography have further alleviated the original challenges of reading.

<sup>26</sup> For the collected sources, see Williams (ed.) 1978: 98–99. For further discussion, see Squire 2011b: 362–4; Petrain 2010: 55 makes a related point independently.

<sup>27</sup> Like Petrain 2010: 55, I would therefore take issue with Amedick 1999: 167, who cites the supposed 'fehlenden Okeanos' as evidence for an earlier Hellenistic Alexandrian prototype that paid better attention to the Homeric text.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Bienkowski 1891: 202: 'delle dieci colonne ... sono rimaste soltanto le cinque ... e parte della sesta, la prima delle quali contiene soli dieci versi (483–492), la seconda ne conta dodici (493–504), la terza quindici (505–519), la quarta tredici (533–545), la sesta non più di dodici (546–557)'. Garrucci 1882: 473 had earlier mentioned the six columns, and Bienkowski refers to the correct number at later points in his article.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. e.g. Pack 1960: 62 n. 960; West (ed.) 1998–2000: 1.xliv, no. 276; idem 2001: 98, no. 276.

<sup>30</sup> See Garrucci 1882: 473–5. In spite of contrary claims (e.g. Petrain 2010: 54 and, regrettably, Squire 2011b: 16 n. 40), it is therefore not quite fair to say that there is no previous attempt at transcription. But, as Bienkowski quickly pointed out, Garrucci's text, published in a non-specialist journal, is riddled with the most crippling mistakes (cf. Robert 1890: 67 n. 10: 'Möchten sie endlich publicirt werden'). Garrucci confuses parts of the inscription that do survive with those that do not (e.g. v. 532), while deriving far-fetched orthographic conclusions from patently mistaken readings (e.g. *ibid.* 476 on the supposed readings *τεθνεῖωτα* and *τεθνεῖωτας* [*sic*] at vv. 537 and 540); some of his supposed orthographic irregularities look decidedly spurious (e.g. *ibid.* 476, suggesting *βαθυλήιον* instead of *βασιλήιον* at v. 550). Garrucci was clearly transcribing from a published text of the *Iliad* as much as from the object itself. This explains why he failed to see either the vast majority of iotacisms, or indeed the more serious errors in the fifth column (*ibid.* 475: v. 538: *εἶμα δ' ἔχ' ἄμφ' ὅμοισι δαφοινεὸν αἶματι φωτῶν*; v. 544: *οἱ δ' ὁπότε στρέψαντες ἰκοῖατο τέλσον ἄρουρης*). Most puzzling of all is Garrucci's presentation of a more or less complete fourth column, despite the fact that this is the most fragmentary part of the inscription today [Fig. 15]. Of course, it is possible that this damage was done after Garrucci's preliminary publication; if so, the accident had certainly taken place before Bienkowski inspected the tablet less than a decade later. Given the unreliability of Garrucci's publication in all other respects, though, it is perhaps more probable that this too is simply fabricated and erroneous; indeed, in those extant places where we are able to compare the fourth column with Garrucci's text, we witness further errors in transcription (e.g. *ἔπειτα* instead of *ἔπειτα* in v. 527).

<sup>31</sup> The cast was commissioned by Rita Amedick in 1997 and subsequently donated to the Archäologisches Institut und Sammlung der Gipsabgüsse at the Georg-August-Universität zu Göttingen (inv. A1695: see <http://viamus.uni-goettingen.de/fr/mmdb/k>, typing A1695 into the 'suchen' field; accessed July 2011).



- Col. I      ΕΜΜΕΝΤΑΙΑΝΕΘΗΚΕΝΔΟΥ[      ]ΝΕΝΔΕΘΑΛΑΣΣΑΝ  
 ΗΕΛΙΟΝΤΑΚΑΜΑΝΤΑΞΕΛΗΝΗΝΤΕΠΛΗΘΟΥΣΑΝ  
 ΕΝΔΕΤΑΤΙΡΕΑΠΑΝΤΑΤΑΤΟΥΡΑΝΟΣΕΞΤΕΦΑΝΩΤΑΙ  
 ΠΛΗΙΑΔΑΣΘΥΑΔΑΣΤΕΤΟΤΕΣΘΕΝΟΣΩΡΙΩΝΟΣ  
 ΑΡΚΤΟΝΘΗΝΚΑΙΑΜΑΞΑΝΕΠΙΚΛΗΣΙΝΚΑΛΕΟΥΣΙΝ  
 ΗΤΑΥΤΟΥΣΤΡΕΦΕΤΑΙΚΑΙΤΟΙΩΡΙΩΝΑΔΟΚΕΥΕΙ  
 ΟΙΗΔΑΜΜΟΡΟΣΕΣΤΙΛΟΕΤΡΩΝΩΚΕΑΝΟΙΟ  
 ΕΝΔΕΔΥΩΠΟΙΗΣΕΠΟΛΕΙΣΜΕΡΟΠΩΝΑΝΘΡΩΠΩΝ  
 ΚΑΛΑΣΕΝΤΗΜΕΡΡΑΓΑΜΟΙΤΕΞΑΝΙΛΑΠΙΝΑΙΤΕ  
 ΝΥΜΦΑΙΔΕΚΘΑΛΑΜΩΝΔ[      ]ΕΝΑΩΝ
- Col. II      ΗΓΙΝΕΟΝ[      ]ΜΕΝΑΙΟΣΟΡΩΡΕΙ  
 ΚΟΥΡΟΙΔΟΡΧΗΣΤΗΡΕΣΕΔΙΝΕΟΝΕΝΔΑΡΑΤΟΙΣΙΝ  
 ΑΥΛΟΙΦΟΡΜΙΓΓΕΣΤΕΒΟΗΝΕΧΟΝΑΙΔΕΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ  
 ΙΣΤΑΜΕΝΟΙΘΑΥΜΑΖΟΝΕΠΙΠΡΟΘΥΡΟΙΣΙΝΕΚΑΣΤΗ  
 ΛΑΟΙΔΙΝΑΓΟΡΗΣΑΝΑΘΡΟΟΙΕΝΘΑΔΕΝΙΚΟΣ  
 ΟΡΟΡΙΔΥΟΔΑΝΔΡΕΣΕΝΙΚΕΟΝΕΙΝΕΚΑΠΟΙΝΗΣ  
 ΑΝΔΡΟΣΑΠΟΦΘΙΜΕΝΟΥΟΜΕΝΕΥΧΕΤΟΠΙΑΝΤΑΠΟΔΟΥΝΑΙ  
 ΔΗΜΩΠΙΦΡΑΥΣΚΩΝΟΔΑΝΑΙΝΕΤΟΜΗΔΕΝΕΛΕΣΘΑΙ  
 ΑΜΦΩΔΕΙΕΣΘΗΝΕΠΙΙΣΤΟΡΙΠΠΑΡΕΛΕΞΘΑΙ  
 ΛΑΟΙΔΑΜΦΟΤΕΡΟΙΣΙΝΕΙΠΗΠΥΟΝΑΜΦΙΣΑΡΩΓΟΙ  
 ΚΗΡΥΚΕΣΔΑΡΑΛΑΟΝΕΡΗΤΥΟΝΟΙΔΕΓΕΡΟΝΤΕΣ  
 ΙΑΤΕΠΙΞΕΣΤΟΙΣΙΛΙΘΟΙΣΙΕΡΩΝΙΚΥΚΛ[
- Col. III      ΣΚΗΠΤΡΑΔΕΚΗΡΥΚΩΝΕΝΧΕΡΣΕΧΟΝΗΕΡΟΦΟ[  
 ΤΟΙΣΙΔΕΠΕΙΤΗΙΣΣΟΝΑΜΟΙΒΗΔΙΣΔΕ[      ]ΚΑΖΟ[  
 ΚΕΙΤΟΔΑΡΕΜΜΕΣΣΟΙΣΙΔΥΩΧΡΥΣΟΙΟΤΑΛ[  
 ΤΩΔΟΜΕΝΟΣΜΕΤΑΤΟΙΣΙΔΙΚΗΝΙΘΥΝΤΑΤ[  
 ΤΗΝΔΕΤΕΡΗΝΠΟΛΝΑΜΦΙΔΥΩ[      ]ΟΙ[  
 ΤΕΥΧΡΕΣΙΛΑΜΠΟΜΕΝΟΙΔΙΧΑ[      ]ΙΣΙ[  
 ΗΕΔΙΑΠΡΑΘΕΕΙΝΗΑΝΔΙΧΑΠΙΑΝΤΑ[  
 ΚΤΗΣΙ[      ]ΝΙΠΤΟΛΙΕΘΡΟΝΕΠΗΡΑΤ[  
 ΟΙΔΟ[      ]ΟΝΤΟΛΟΧΩΔΥΠ[  
 ΤΙΧ[      ]ΙΤΕΦΙΛΑΙΚΑΙΝ[  
 ΡΥ[      ]ΙΔΑΝΕΡΑ[  
 ΟΙ[      ]ΗΣΚΑΙΠΙΑ[  
 Α[      ]ΜΑΤΑΕ[  
 Κ[      ]ΕΞΙΝ[  
 [      ]ΟΝΕ[

- ἐμ μὲν γαῖαν ἔθηκ', ἐν δ' οὐ[ρανό]ν, ἐν δὲ θάλασσαν,  
 ἠέλιόν τ' ἀκάμαντα σελήνην τε πλήθουσιν,  
 485 ἐν δὲ τὰ τίρεα πάντα, τά τ' οὐρανὸς ἐστεφάνωται,  
 Πιληϊάδας θ' Ὑάδας τε τό τε σθένος Ὠρίωνος  
 Ἄρκτόν θ', ἣν καὶ Ἄμαξαν ἐπὶ κλησὶν καλέουσιν,  
 ἢ τ' αὐτοῦ στρέφεται καὶ τ' {οι} Ὠρίωνα δοκεύει,  
 οἷη δ' ἄμμορός ἐστι λοετρῶν Ὠκεανοῖο.  
 490 ἐν δὲ δύο ποίησε πόλεις μερόπων ἀνθρώπων  
 καλὰς, ἐν τῇ μέρ ῥα γάμοι τ' ἔσαν ἱλαπίναι τε,  
 νύμφαι δ' ἐκ θαλάμων δ[αΐδων ὑπο λαμπομ]ενάων  
  
 ἡγίνεον [ἀνὰ ἄστρ, πολὺς δ' ὑ]μέναιος ὁρώρει  
 κοῦροι δ' ὀρχηστήρες ἐδίνεον, ἐν δ' ἄρα τοῖσιν  
 495 αὐλοὶ φόρμιγγές τε βοὴν ἔχον· αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες  
 ἱστάμενοι θαύμαζον ἐπὶ προθύροισιν ἐκάστη.  
 λαοὶ δ' ἰν ἀγορῇ ἔσαν ἀθρόοι· ἔνθα δὲ νῆκος  
 ὁρόρι, δύο δ' ἄνδρες ἐνέκεον εἵνεκα ποινῆς  
 ἀνδρὸς ἀποφθιμένου. ὃ μὲν εὐχετο πάντ' ἀποδοῦναι  
 500 δῆμῳ πιφ[ρ]αύσκων, ὃ δ' ἀναίνετο μηδὲν ἐλέσθαι·  
 ἄμφω δὲ ἰέσθην ἐπὶ ἱστορί π[ι]ρ[ρ]α ἐλέσθαι.  
 λαοὶ δ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἐπήπυνον ἀμφὶς ἀρωγοί·  
 κήρυκες δ' ἄρα λαὸν ἐρήτυον· οἱ δὲ γέροντες  
 ἵατ' ἐπὶ ξεστοῖσι λίθοις ἱερῶ ἐνὶ κύκλ[ω].  
  
 505 σκῆπτρα δὲ κηρύκων ἐν χέρσ' ἔχον ἡεροφό[νων]  
 τοῖσι δ' ἔπειτ' ἥϊσσαν, ἀμοιβηδὶς δ' ἐ[δί]καζο[ν].  
 κεῖτο δ' ἄρ' ἐμ μέσσοισι δύο χρυσοῖο τάλ[αντα].  
 τῷ δόμεν, ὅς μετὰ τοῖσι δίκην ἰθύντα[τα εἴποι].  
 τὴν δ' ἐτέρην πόλ[ιν] ἀμφὶ δύο [στρατ]οὶ [εἴ]ατο λαῶν  
 510 τεύχ[ρ]εσι λαμπόμενοι· δίχα [δέ σφ]ισι[ν] ἦνδανε βουλή,  
 ἥ ἐ διαπραθέειν ἢ ἄνδιχα πάντα [δάσασθαι]  
 κτήσι[ν] ὅση[ν] πτολίεθρον ἐπήρατ[ον] ἐντὸς ἔεργεν.  
 οἱ δ' ο[ὐ] πω πεῖθ[ον]το, λόχῳ δ' ὑπ[ε]θωρήσσοντο.  
 τίχ[ος] μὲν ῥ' ἄλοχο[ί] τε φίλαι καὶ ν[ή]πια τέκνα  
 515 ῥύ[ατ] ἐφεσταότες, περ[ὶ] δ' ἀνέρα[ς] οὐς ἔχε γῆρας,  
 οἱ [δ'] ἴσαν· ἦρχε δ' ἄρά σφιν Ἀρ[η]ς καὶ Πα[λλ]ὰς Ἀθήνη  
 ἄ[μφω] χρυσεῖω, χρύσεια δὲ εἵ[ματα] ἔ[σθην].  
 κ[αλῶ] καὶ μεγάλῳ σὺν τεύχ[ε]σιν, [ὥς] τε θεῷ περ  
 [ἀμφὶς] ἀριζήλω· λαοὶ δ' ὑπολίζ[ονε]ς ἦσαν.

Col. IV [ ]ΘΙΣΦΙΣΙΝΕΙΚ[ ]ΗΣΑΙ  
 [ ]ΝΙΑΝΤΕΣΣΙΒΡΟΤΟΙΣ[  
 [ ]ΝΟΙΑΙΘΟΠΙΧΑΛΚΩ  
 [ ]ΟΠΟΙΕΙΑΤΟΛΑΩΝ  
 [ ]ΙΕΛΙΚΑΣΒΟΥΣ  
 [ ]ΝΟΜΗΕΣ  
 [ ]ΝΟΗΣΑΝ  
 [ ]ΕΠΙΤΑ  
 [ ]  
 [ ]Σ  
 [ ]ΥΣΙΝ  
 [ ]  
 [? ]

Col. V ΣΤΗΣΑΜΕΝΟΙΔΕΜΑΧΟΝΤΟΜΑΧΗΝΠΟΤΑΜΟΙΟΠΑΡΟΧΘΑΣ  
 ΒΑΛΛΟΝΔΑΛΛΗΛΟΥΣΧΑΛΚΗΡΕΣΙΝΕΝΧΕΙΗΣΙΝ  
 ΕΝΔΕΡΙΣΕΝΔΕΚΥΔΟΙΜΟΣΟΜΙΛΕΟΝΕΝΔΟΛΟΗΚΗΡ  
 ΑΛΛΟΝΖΩΟΝΕΧΟΥΣΑΝΕΟΥΤΑΤΟΝΑΛΛΟΝΑΟΥΤΟΝ  
 ΑΛΛΟΝΤΕΘΝΗΩΤΑΚΑΤΑΜΟΘΟΝΕΙΛΚΕΠΟΔΟΙΝ  
 ΙΜΑΔΕΧΑΜΦΟΜΟΙΣΙΔΑΦΩΜΟΙΣΙΔΑΦΟΤΤΙΟΝ  
 ΩΜΙΛΕΥΝΔΩΣΠΕΡΖΩΟΙΒΡΟΤΟΙΗΔΕΜΑΧΟΝΤΟ  
 ΝΕΚΡΟΥΣΤΕΑΛΛΗΛΩΝΕΡΥΟΝΚΑΤΑΤΕΘΝΗΩΤΑΣ  
 ΕΝΔΕΤΙΘΕΙΝΗΟΝΜΑΛΑΚΗΝΠΙΠΕΙΡΑΝΑΡΟΥΡΑΝ  
 ΕΥΡΕΙΑΝΤΡΙΠΟΛΟΝΠΟΛΛΟΙΔΑΡΟΤΗΡΕΞΕΝΑΥΤΗ  
 ΖΕΥΓΕΑΔΙΝΕΥΟΝΤΕΣΕΛΑΣΤΡΕΟΝΕ[ ]ΑΚΑΙΕΝΘΑ  
 ΟΙΔΟΠΙΟΔΙΕΣΤΡΕΨΑΣΙΚΟΙΑΤΟΤΕΛΣΟΝΑΡΟΥΡ[  
 [ ]ΕΠΙΕΙΤΗΧΕΡΣΙΔΕΠΙΑΣΜΕΛΙΗΔΕΟΣΟΙΝΟ[

Col. VI ΔΟΣΚΕΝΑΝΗΡΕΠΙ[  
 ΙΕΜΕΝΟΙΝΕΙΟΙΟΒΑ[  
 ΗΔΕΜΕΛΑΙΝΕΤ[  
 ΧΡΥΣΕΙΗΠΕΡΕΟ[  
 ΕΝΔΕΤΙΘΕΙΤ[  
 ΗΜΩΝΟΞΙ[  
 ΔΡΑΓΜΑΤΑ[  
 ΑΛΛΑΔΑΜΑ[  
 ΤΡ[ ]Δ[  
 ΠΑΙΔΕΣ[  
 ΑΣΠΕΡ[  
 ΣΚΗΠ[

- 520 [οἱ δ' ὅτε δὴ ῥ' ἵκανον] ὅθι σφισιν εἰκ[ε λοχ]ῆσαι  
[ἐν ποταμῷ, ὅθι τ' ἀρδμὸς ἔη]ν πάντεσσι βροτοῖσ[ιν,]  
[ἔνθ' ἄρα τοί γ' ἵζοντ' εἰλυμέ]νοι αἴθοπι χαλκῷ.  
[τοῖσι δ' ἔπειτ' ἀπάνευθε δύω σκ]οποὶ εἶατο λαῶν  
[δέγμενοι ὁππότε μῆλα ἰδοῖατο κα]ὶ ἔλικας βοῦς·  
525 [οἱ δὲ τάχα προγένοντο, δύω δ' ἅμ' ἔποντο] νομῆες  
[τερπόμενοι σύριγξι· δόλον δ' οὐ τι προ]νόησαν  
[οἱ μὲν τὰ προῖδόντες ἐπέδραμον, ὦκα δ'] ἔπιτα  
[τάμνοντ' ἀμφὶ βοῶν ἀγέλας καὶ πάεα καλὰ]  
[ἀργεννέων οἴων, κτεῖνον δ' ἐπὶ μηλοβοτῆρα]ς.  
530 [οἱ δ' ὥς οὖν ἐπύθοντο πολὺν κέλαδον παρὰ βο]υσὶν  
[εἰράων προπάροιθε καθήμενοι, αὐτίκ' ἐφ' ἵππων]  
[βάντες ἀερσιπόδων μετεκίαθον· αἶψα δ' ἵκοντο,]  
  
στησάμενοι δ' ἐμάχοντο μάχην ποταμοῖο παρ' ὄχθας,  
βάλλον δ' ἀλλήλους χαλκήρεσιν ἐνχείησιν.  
535 ἐν δ' Ἔρις ἐν δὲ Κυδοιμὸς ὀμίλεον, ἐν δ' ὀλοὴ Κήρ,  
ἄλλον ζῶν ἔχουσα νεούτατον, ἄλλον ἄουτον,  
ἄλλον τεθνηῶτα κατὰ μόθον εἵλκε ποδοῖν·  
ἵμα δ' ἔχ' ἀμφ' ὅμοισι {δαφωμοισιδαφοττιον}  
ὀμίλευν δ' ὥσπερ ζωοὶ βροτοὶ ἡδ' ἐμάχοντο,  
540 νεκρούς τε ἀλλήλων ἔρυνον κατατεθνηῶτας.  
ἐν δ' ἐτίθει νηὸν μαλακὴν πίειραν ἄρουραν  
εὐρεΐαν τρίπολον· πολλοὶ δ' ἀροτῆρες ἐν αὐτῇ  
ζεύγεα δινεύοντες ἐλάστρεον ἔ[νθ]α καὶ ἔνθα.  
οἱ δ' ὀπό[διε] στρέψα(ν)τε(ς) ἰκοῖατο τέλσον ἀρούρ[ης,]  
545 [τοῖσι δ'] ἔπειτ'(η) χερσὶ δέπας μελιηδέος οἶνο[υ]  
  
δόσκεν ἀνὴρ ἐπι[ών· τοὶ δὲ στρέψασκον ἀν' ὄγμους,]  
ἰέμενοι νειοῖο βα[θείης τέλσον ἰκέσθαι.]  
ἡ δὲ μελαίνετ' [ὀπισθεν, ἀρηρομένη δὲ ἐφῶκει,]  
χρυσείη περ ἐο[ῦσα· τὸ δὴ περὶ θαῦμα τέτυκτο.]  
550 ἐν δ' ἐτίθει τ[έμενος βασιλῆϊον· ἔνθα δ' ἔριθοι]  
ἡμῶν ὀξί[ας δρεπάνας ἐν χερσὶν ἔχοντες.]  
δράγματα [δ' ἄλλα μετ' ὄγμον ἐπήτριμα πίπτον ἔραζε,]  
ἄλλα δ' ἀμα[λλοδετῆρες ἐν ἐλλεδανοῖσι δέοντο.]  
τρ[εῖς] δ' [ἄρ' ἀμαλλοδετῆρες ἐφέστασαν· αὐτὰρ ὀπισθεν]  
555 παῖδες [δραγμαεύοντες ἐν ἀγκαλίδεσσι φέροντες,]  
ἀσπερ[χὲς πάρεχον. βασιλεὺς δ' ἐν τοῖσι σιωπῇ]  
σκῆπτρον ἔχων ἐστήκει ἐπ' ὄγμου γηθόσυνος κῆρ]

In discussing the text, I limit myself to just three interconnecting areas of comment. These concern a) the presentation of the text; b) the orthography and variants; and c) the circular arrangement of the columns.

#### A) Presentation and hands

The most striking aspect of the text is of course its size. The average letter height is around 1 mm, although some letters (for example, in the third column) are less than 0.7 mm. As far as I am aware, this is the smallest inscribed text known to us from antiquity.<sup>32</sup> We read of apocryphal tales of similar feats of writing – the whole *Iliad* made to fit within a nutshell, for example, and the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* ‘written’ on a sesame seed<sup>33</sup> – and there are interesting parallels with the tiny letters of the Mani-Codex, produced in fifth-century Egypt.<sup>34</sup> We also know that such games with scale could have an art historical as well as literary dimension: Pliny tells of a legendary competition between Apelles and Protogenes as to who could draw the finest line – adding that the *suptilitas* of the minimalist line-drawing comprised an *absolutum opus* in its own right (*HN* 35.81–3).<sup>35</sup> Whatever else we make of our ‘Achillean shield’, its little size clearly had large significance.<sup>36</sup>

But was the text legible? Despite the scale, the letters are written with astonishing precision. Substantial gaps are left between each line, at least in the first, second, fourth and fifth columns, and this conspicuously aids legibility. Still, even with a magnifying glass, the text is exceedingly difficult to read.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps the addition of paint once helped to pick out the letters. A handful of Iliac tablets retain faint traces of colour (gold, red and black), and it is just possible that our tablet too was painted.<sup>38</sup> But I am not convinced that this would have solved the challenges of deciphering the text: scholars are wont to labour with magnifying glasses, but original audiences surely were not. In my view, it must have been more important to know that the passage was there than actually to read it. Besides, the sorts of élite clientele for whom tablets like this were intended hardly needed a text: if audiences knew the lines by heart, the slightest of visual prompts could turn object back into song.<sup>39</sup>

Whatever the difficulties of reading the inscription, these are nothing compared to the challenges of making it. The engraver was called upon to produce letter-crossbars, strokes and arms that measure a mere fraction of a millimetre. To my mind, there can be no doubting that the engraver made recourse to some sort of magnification device, despite a growing archaeological consensus against the use of lenses among Graeco-Roman artists.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Close parallels are to be found on other *Tabulae Iliacae*, not least in the miniature *grammata* inscribed on the monumental stelai of tablets 1A, 8E, 14G: on tablet 8E, for example, a stele measuring c. 8.5 cm is inscribed with 64 lines, and there are also striking correspondences in the presentation of the letters.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Plin. *HN* 7.85; Plut. *Mor. (Comm. not.)* 1083d–e; Arr. *VH* 1.17; these and other texts are discussed in Squire 2011b: esp. 1–25.

<sup>34</sup> Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis (Die Kölner Papyrus-Sammlung inv. 4780). Koenen and Römer (eds.) 1985 label the manuscript as ‘der kleinste erhaltene Kodex aus der Antike’ (vii–xxv): the codex measures 38 × 45 mm, although the actual space used for writing is only 24 × 35 mm, with 23 lines featured per page; as on our tablet, the letter height of the Mani-Codex is again therefore less than 1 mm. Other comparanda might include the microscopic texts inscribed not only on Greek and Roman gems, but also on e.g. the gold ‘Orphic tablets’, with their Greek letters ‘minuscule in size’ (Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008: 2). More tricky, I think, are Martial’s miniature epigrams on miniaturised codices of literary greats (Mart. 14.183–96: cf. Squire 2011b: 278–84).

<sup>35</sup> For the significance of the story, see Squire 2011b: 271–4.

<sup>36</sup> More generally on the art and poetics of scale on the *Tabulae*, see Squire 2011b: 247–302.

<sup>37</sup> To claim, as one scholar does, that the ‘text is easily legible with a magnifying glass’ (Horsfall 1979: 33) would be a glib exaggeration; better to say, following Bienkowski 1891: 201, that ‘i versi di Omero ... sono illegibili ad occhio nudo’. For two more general recent discussions of the legibility of Roman Imperial epigraphy, see von Hesberg 2009 and Hammerstaedt 2011: esp. 241–3.

<sup>38</sup> For the collected evidence, see Squire 2011b: 64–5. By contrast, Amedick 1999: 198 concludes of our shield that ‘wenn der Stein wegen seiner Farbe kostbar war, ist es unwahrscheinlich, daß er durch eine farbige Fassung verdeckt werden sollte’.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. below, n. 64.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. e.g. Plantzos 1997: esp. 457–9. Discussing the miniature writing of the Mani-Codex, Gardner and Lieu 1996: 154–161 conclude that ‘a glass-bottle filled with water was the most likely enlarging tool’ (154; cf. eidem 2004: 39–40). It

The neatness of the inscribed text is especially remarkable given the absence of any surviving rule. The spacing is evenly distributed within each column, and each line follows a neat and regular path. This must have been all the more difficult in view of the curvature of the lines – the fact that each horizontal verse had to be fitted *around* the tablet's rim. Only occasionally is there any sign as to the strain of this challenge: observe, for instance, how the final omicron of εὔχετο is written slightly too high in verse 499 (seventh line of the second column [Fig. 13]), or how verse 539 (seventh line of the fifth column) veers slightly upwards towards its middle [Figs. 16–17].

Magnified photography helps bring out the superlative quality of the engraving [Figs. 12–19, enlarged to an approximate scale of between 3:1 and 4:1]. The cutter carefully differentiated between even the most similar-looking of letters. One challenge, for instance, was to distinguish between Λ and Α, and we see the artist taking laborious pains to do so – for example, in βάλλον δ' ἀλλήλους, v. 534 (second line of the fifth column [Figs. 16–17]), ἄλλον, vv. 536–7 (fourth and fifth lines of the same), and ἀλλήλων, v. 540 (eighth line of the same). No less distinct is the difference between Ε and Σ (as, for example, in ἄνδρες, v. 498, sixth line of the second column [Fig. 13]). Only occasionally are letters more ambiguous, and this has usually to do with the stone's damaged surface. On the other hand, there is a recurrent difficulty in distinguishing between the letters Η, Μ and Ν (e.g. δόμεν, v. 508, fourth line of the third column [Fig. 14]), and so too with Ο and Ω throughout.

Careful observation also reveals something hitherto unnoticed: the sixth column is attributable to a different hand from those preceding it (at least from the third line, v. 548, onwards). This can clearly be seen even in a photograph [Figs. 18–19]: the spacing is very different, with smaller gaps left between the lines. There is little to distinguish the actual letter forms (letters are generally slightly wider, as in the arms of the letter Ε); here, as in the earlier columns, the cutter also strives for precision (observe e.g. ἄλλα δ' ὀμοί, v. 553, eighth line). If this is a different cutter, he has nevertheless been schooled in the same cursive tradition. But the result is simply less neat and less accurately proportioned. Perhaps this explains one other possible feature of the sixth column's text: according to Bienkowski, the sixth column is the only place where breathings are occasionally marked. Bienkowski supposed four curved apostrophe-like shapes, at the beginning of vv. 547, 548 and 551, and in the middle of v. 554; I was unable to see all of these, although something is discernible at vv. 548 and 551 (third and sixth lines).

How to explain this change of hand? All manner of reasons are possible. But given the ocular strain of merely reading the text, one can well imagine that our cutter could only manage five columns before suffering the consequences, necessitating a new pair of eyes and hands.<sup>41</sup>

### *B) Orthography and variants*

The reproduced text is also of high quality. As Bienkowski established, it is mostly faithful to what has come to be called the 'vulgate';<sup>42</sup> on the basis of Bienkowski's preliminary observations, moreover, Martin West has noted some of the variants in his latest Teubner edition.<sup>43</sup> The most significant variants are as follows: ἔθηκ', v. 483, rather than ἔτευξ' (repeating the verb found at vv. 541, 550, 561, 607, albeit never in this form); βροτοῖσ[iv], v. 521, rather than βοτοῖσ[iv] (West lists five parallels); τοῖσι δ' ἔπειτ', v. 506, instead of τοῖσιν ἔπειτ'; and εἶλκε, v. 537, instead of ἔλκε (the sole testimony for West's preferred reading). Following

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hardly needs saying, though, that chiselling a miniature text in stone proves more of an ocular challenge than drawing lines on papyrus.

<sup>41</sup> It is impossible to say anything meaningful about how these hands relate to that/those of the tablet's verso. Although there are similarities (P with high loop, for example), the letters of the verso palindromic inscription have been specially designed for purpose (as is most clear in the central Α, which quite literally pointed the way to the central letter of the puzzling altar-inscription above: Squire 2011b: 307–10).

<sup>42</sup> Bienkowski 1891: 206–7: 'In somma il nostro marmo sebbene debba considerarsi come uno dei codici più antichi di Omero, non presenta alcuna variante più importante e raccomandabile al testo di Omero, essendo in generale d'accordo con la così detta vulgata, in alcuni luoghi segnatamente col codice D ...'.

<sup>43</sup> West (ed.) 1998–2000, with apparatus criticus for *Il. 18.483, 492, 493, 496, 497, 499, 501, 505, 506, 509, 517, 521, 525, 537, 538, 540.*

Bienkowski, West notes two readings that, in my view, cannot be supported: ἀνά is not found in v. 493 (this part of the line is too damaged to decipher), and it is by no means clear that we should read ἦ[σθην] rather than ἔ[σθην] in v. 517. Two other minor variants are not recorded in the Teubner apparatus: ὥσπερ for ὥστε at v. 539; and the variant form ὠμίλευν for ὠμίλεον at v. 539 (although West lists five other parallels for the reading). As for v. 515, where I think the text read περὶ δ' ἀνέρας οὓς ἔχε γῆρας (instead of the standard μετὰ δ' ἀνέρας οὓς ἔχε γῆρας), I return to the point in the context of other errors (iii) below.

Bienkowski also provided a preliminary discussion of orthography.<sup>44</sup> Most of the variant spellings are perfectly in keeping with the vowel shifts associated with spoken *koinē*.<sup>45</sup> So it is, for example, that εἰ is often reduced to ī: τίρεα < τείρεα, v. 485; ἰλαπίναι < εἰλαπίναι, v. 491; ἰν < εἰν, v. 497; νῖκος < νεῖκος, v. 497; ὀρόρι < ὀρώρει, v. 498; ἐνίκεον < ἐνεῖκεον, v. 498; πῖαρ < πεῖραρ, v. 501; ἴατ' < εἴατ', v. 504; τῖχ[ος] < τεῖχ[ος], v. 514; ἔπιτα < ἔπειτα, v. 527; ἱμα < εἶμα, v. 538; ὀξί[ας] < ὀξεῖ[ας], v. 551.<sup>46</sup> This introduces an inconsistency of spelling, but one itself consistent with contemporary written Greek (δοκεύει, v. 488; ὀρώρει, v. 493; εἵνεκα, v. 498; ἔπειτ', v. 506; κεῖτο, v. 507; διαπραθέειν, v. 511; εἶκε, v. 520; εἵατο, v. 523; ἐνχεῖσιν, v. 534; ἐτίθει, v. 541; πείραυν, v. 541; εὐρεῖαν, v. 542; ἔπειτ', v. 545; νεοῖο, v. 547; ἐτίθει, v. 550). In one instance, εἰ is instead written as η (νηόν, v. 541): this aligns with the orthography of the 'Theodorean' Iliac tablets at large, which associate themselves interchangeably with something either Θεοδώρηος (tablets 1A, 2NY, 3C, 4N, 5O) or Θεοδώρειος (tablet 20Par).<sup>47</sup> The substitution of ὀ for ω should be understood similarly (ὀρόρι < ὠρώρει, v. 498; ἡεροφώ[νων] < ἡεροφώ[ων], v. 505; ὅμοισι < ὠμοισι, v. 538; κατατεθνηῶτας < κατατεθνηῶτας v. 540), even though the spelling is again inconsistent *passim* (compare e.g. ὀρώρει, v. 493, with ὠρόρι, v. 498). We might note that most cases of omicron being written for omega has the vowel accented: by this period it was probably already spoken with a slight stress accent and perhaps with a difference in quality from an unaccented omega.<sup>48</sup>

Other aspects of the inscription further align with the suggested date and cultural milieu. Paragogic nu is inserted before vowels and at the end of lines throughout (with one possible exception at the end of v. 521).<sup>49</sup> The occasional failure to mark elisions perhaps signals a Latinate influence (δὲ ἰέσθην, v. 501; τε ἀλλήλων, v. 540). Similarly, there is nothing unusual about the shifts in consonants (ἐμ μὲν < ἐν μὲν, v. 483; μέρ ῥα < μὲν ῥα, v. 491; ἐμ μέσσοισι < ἐν μέσσοισι, v. 507; ἐνχεῖσιν < ἐγχεῖσιν, v. 534), or the complete absence of iota subscripts.<sup>50</sup> As Bienkowski noted, all of these features have parallels on other *Tabulae Iliacae*, as well as on earlier inscribed Homeric texts, most notably the so-called 'Homeric cups' of the second century BC.<sup>51</sup>

As for actual mistakes, these are relatively few and can be divided into four types: i) omission of letters; ii) insertion of letters; iii) incorrect substitution of letters; and iv) more serious errors.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Bienkowski 1891: 204–5, and compare the preliminary comments of Garrucci 1882: 476–8.

<sup>45</sup> For an overview, see e.g. Horrocks 1997: 102–27, esp. 102–5.

<sup>46</sup> Bienkowski 1891: 204 mentions possible additional instances in χρυσίη (v. 549) and τρῖς (v. 554), although I was unable to follow his readings.

<sup>47</sup> On the clear rationale behind the orthographic variation, see Squire 2011b: 209. One might also compare the variation in spelling Ἀχιλλεῖος / Ἀχιλλῆος between our tablet and tablet 5O (see above, n. 15).

<sup>48</sup> I could see no reason to follow Bienkowski's suggestion of TO at the beginning of v. 508 (1891: 203, 204): as already noted, it is often difficult to differentiate between omicron and omega.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Bienkowski 1891: 205, citing vv. 521–2 (βροτοῖσι / ἔνθ'). But the letters are badly worn here, and what Bienkowski reads as an iota in fact seems part of the damaged surface; although there is no trace of the letter, we perhaps cannot rule out the possibility of a nu (βροτοῖσι[ν] / ἔνθ').

<sup>50</sup> Unlike Bienkowski 1891: 205, I find no exception in v. 542: what Bienkowski distinguished as iota at the end of the line more likely forms part of the damaged surface (hence its continuation into the line above); this is easier to see on the Göttingen cast than on the Roman original.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Jahn 1873: 78–9: on the basis of the twelve tablets known to him, Jahn cites 21 examples for εἰ reduced to ī, 18 for εἰ as η, and 13 examples for ω as ὀ; he also concludes that 'das *i* mutum wird meistens ausgelassen' (except sometimes for the dative singular), and notes parallels for the inconsistent elision of vowels and consonants. As the author concludes, all of this points to the 'Übereinstimmung, dass die Tafeln auch dadurch sich als zusammengehörig erweisen' (79).

<sup>52</sup> For similar sorts of errors on other *Tabulae Iliacae*, see Jahn 1873: 79.

- i) Letters are omitted in two verses:  $\pi\acute{\iota}\alpha\rho < \pi\acute{\iota}\rho\alpha\rho$ , v. 501;  $\pi\acute{\omicron}\lambda\nu < \pi\acute{\omicron}\lambda\iota\nu$ , v. 509.
- ii) Letters are added in three verses:  $\tau\acute{\omicron}\iota \text{ Ὠρίωνα} < \tau' \text{ Ὠρίωνα}$ , v. 488;  $\pi\iota\phi\rho\acute{\alpha}\upsilon\sigma\kappa\omega\nu < \pi\iota\phi\alpha\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\kappa\omega\nu$ , v. 500;  $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\chi\rho\epsilon\sigma\iota < \tau\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\chi\epsilon\sigma\iota$ , v. 510.
- iii) Letters have been substituted in three verses:  $\nu\acute{\omicron}\mu\phi\alpha\iota < \nu\acute{\omicron}\mu\phi\alpha\varsigma$ , v. 492;  $\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\alpha}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\iota < \iota\sigma\tau\acute{\alpha}\mu\epsilon\nu\alpha\iota$ , v. 496;  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\rho\alpha[\varsigma] < \acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\rho\epsilon[\varsigma]$ , v. 515;  $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\epsilon\iota\tau\{\eta\} \chi\epsilon\rho\sigma\acute{\iota} < \acute{\epsilon}\pi\epsilon\iota\tau' \acute{\epsilon}\nu \chi\epsilon\rho\sigma\acute{\iota}$ , v. 545. Bienkowski supposes another error in v. 515, supposing that  $[\mu\epsilon\tau]\acute{\alpha}$  has been corrupted to  $[\mu\epsilon\tau]\acute{\iota}$ . This is of course possible. But I think it unlikely. We might just as equally suppose that the line contained a variant preposition: although there are no extant parallels,  $[\pi\epsilon\rho]\acute{\iota}$  would be one neat suggestion.<sup>53</sup>
- iv) There are two more serious problems, both in the fifth column [Figs. 16–17]. First, v. 538: the verse known to us as  $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\alpha \delta' \acute{\epsilon}\chi' \acute{\alpha}\mu\phi' \acute{\omega}\mu\omicron\iota\sigma\iota \delta\alpha\phi\omicron\iota\nu\epsilon\delta\omicron\nu \acute{\alpha}\iota\mu\alpha\tau\iota \phi\omega\tau\acute{\omega}\nu$  goes astray in the fourth foot, with its double dittography of  $\delta\alpha\phi$  and  $\phi\omega\mu\omicron\iota\sigma\iota$  sounds ( $\mu\alpha\delta\epsilon\chi\alpha\mu\phi\omicron\mu\omicron\iota\sigma\iota\delta\alpha\phi\omicron\mu\omicron\iota\sigma\iota\delta\alpha\phi\omicron\tau\tau\iota\omicron\nu$ ); after writing the letters  $\delta\alpha\phi$  for the fourth time in quick succession, the cutter seems to have noticed the mistake – leaving a slight space, and then ending the line with a curious sequence of letters (left deliberately indecipherable but roughly filling the space?). The second substantial error comes just a few lines later at the beginning of v. 544:  $\omicron\iota\delta\omicron\mu\omicron\delta\iota\epsilon\sigma\tau\rho\epsilon\psi\alpha\varsigma$ . There are two mistakes here: first, something goes wrong halfway through  $\acute{\omicron}\pi\acute{\omicron}\tau\epsilon$ ;<sup>54</sup> immediately afterwards, a singular participle ( $\sigma\tau\rho\acute{\epsilon}\psi\alpha\varsigma$ ) takes the place of the plural  $\sigma\tau\rho\acute{\epsilon}\psi\alpha\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$ .<sup>55</sup> I suspect that the engraver observed both mistakes. In the latter verse, it seems likely that the cutter did his best to correct the momentary lapse in concentration, turning the error into a form that was at least morphologically accurate; as for v. 538, perhaps the engraver simply hoped that nobody would notice – although the textual error is at odds with the precision demonstrated elsewhere on the relief.

What to make of these mistakes? In my view, the cutter knew his Greek, which explains why so many errors are morphologically correct even though syntactically mistaken ( $\nu\acute{\omicron}\mu\phi\alpha\iota$ , v. 492;  $\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\alpha}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\iota$ , v. 496;  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\rho\alpha[\varsigma]$ , v. 515;  $\sigma\tau\rho\acute{\epsilon}\psi\alpha\varsigma$ , v. 544). There is less point conjecturing as to the specific origin of the errors – the question as to which mistakes are due to our cutter, and which derive from his written source. Speculation about the supposed ‘original’ behind our hypothetical ‘copy’ has been a favourite scholarly endeavour, but in my view this has been a somewhat futile debate.<sup>56</sup>

Instead, let me indulge in a wild speculation of my own. As we have observed (above (iv)), the two most serious mistakes come in the fifth column. We have also noted (p. 11) that there appears a change in cutter between the fifth column and the sixth. Putting these two facts together, one may well ask: are these mistakes themselves the result of ocular strain – signs that the cutter’s eyes are now suffering the consequences; alternatively, did somebody else notice the errors, and is that the reason for the change in hand? That concentration has waned here – or else that the cutter was suffering as a result of his labour – is clear from the further reduction in the scaled horizontal length of the fifth column’s final five verses (vv. 541–5).

### C) Arrangement

A word, finally, about the visual organisation of the text. Originally, there must have been a total of ten columns, each containing between ten and fifteen verses, symmetrically arranged around the object; we can also be confident, I think, that the description ended in v. 608, with the final image of the ‘great might of

<sup>53</sup> I owe the suggestion to Martin West: cf. Bienkowski 1891: 203, 206 (supposing the error ‘più antico del marmo’). I do not necessarily see a mistake in v. 513, as Bienkowski 1891: 203 suggests ( $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\epsilon\theta\omega\rho\acute{\eta}\sigma\sigma\omicron\nu\tau\omicron$  rendered as  $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\omicron\theta\omega\rho\acute{\eta}\sigma\sigma\omicron\nu\tau\omicron$ ): this section of the line is simply too fragmentary to permit decisive judgment.

<sup>54</sup> Bienkowski 1891: 206 suggests that the engraver first wrote  $\Delta\text{H}$ , attempting then to correct the first part of the eta into a tau, and the second part into an epsilon through additional ligature. But it is difficult to support this conjecture on the basis of what can be seen.

<sup>55</sup> I pass over Bienkowski’s reading of v. 554 as either a variant or mistake. Bienkowski 1891: 203 reads the letters as  $\text{ΤΡΙΣΙΣΤΑ}$ , and speculates that ‘un errore sarebbe tanto meno strano in quanto il verso 554 è parimente corrotto in molti codici’ (206). But the surface is once again too damaged to reach a firm conclusion.

<sup>56</sup> The argument goes back to Bienkowski 1891, but cf. Fittschen 1973: 3 and especially Amedick 1999: 195–205 (‘wahrscheinlicher ist es, daß diese Werkstatt den Schild des Achilleus vollständig nach einem Vorbild kopierte’, p. 196 – supposing, as ever, an Alexandrian original).



River Ocean' around the shield's rim [Fig. 11]. Georg Lippold, by contrast, claimed that there were eleven columns (Lippold 1932: 1889). The extant proportions militate against this hypothesis: if the text ends with v. 608, there are 51 lines missing; divided between four additional columns, each would include an average of 12.75, which approximates the average of 12.33 verses contained in surviving columns.<sup>57</sup>

We cannot be certain about the distribution of lines within the missing four columns of text. Analysing the six columns that do survive, we see that half of these pay attention to end-of-line sentence breaks (at vv. 519, 532 and 557), whereas the other half do not, even though it would have been relatively easy to do so by adding or removing one or two verses. Although Fig. 11 shows one guestimate as to how the remaining verses might have been distributed, it is by no means certain that the cutter paid heed to such semantic breaks.

The fact that the text has been laid out in circular form strikes me as in and of itself important. As numerous critics have pointed out, the Homeric ecphrasis is ring-composed, with the opening image of the sea (v. 483) echoed in the closing figure of 'the great might of River Ocean' (ποταμοῖο μέγα σθένος Ὀκεανοῖο, v. 607 – the genitive nouns encircling the accusatives).<sup>58</sup> Ancient critics seem to have recognised the ring formation (κύκλος), and some commented on it explicitly.<sup>59</sup> The columns of our tablet amount to a similar literary critical gesture. The circular form of the text takes the metaphorical ring of Homer's description and literalises the figure: where the columns of a papyrus scroll march unswervingly from left to right – reading the text *qua* text means moving from a literally literal A to B – the columns of this visualised object end where they begin, symmetrically placed at either side of Helios.<sup>60</sup> Although there certainly is readerly movement, in other words, the rounded composition negates the sequential progression, spinning readers around in a figurative and literal circle.

This self-conscious interest in order and arrangement forms part of a broader concern on the part of our artist and engraver. As we have said, the verso makes an explicit issue of its *grammata* layout [Figs. 3–4]: by experimenting with different ways of figuring a hexameter text, audiences were invited to contemplate how words are both like and unlike images. The zigzagging scenes in the lower section of the recto can be understood in similar fashion, visually interrupting the linear progression of the verbal ecphrasis [Fig. 6].<sup>61</sup> In my view, the circular arrangement of the recto rim inscription develops the same multidirectional conceit: reading the circular text means moving in a plurality of at once horizontal and vertical directions. This is true on both the micro-level of individual *grammata* and on the macro-level of collective columns: if both letters and columns move from left to right, they also oscillate from top to bottom (the lines within each column, no less than the first five columns together), as indeed from bottom to top (whereas columns one to five zigzag their way to the tablet's base, columns six to ten ascend upwards once more).<sup>62</sup> However

<sup>57</sup> Of course, such numerical analysis raises the question of what happened in v. 604 (cf. Revermann 1998: esp. 34–5) – but the general point stands.

<sup>58</sup> E.g. DuBois 1982: 17; Stanley 1993: esp. 9–13; Becker 1995: 147–8.

<sup>59</sup> E.g. Eustathius ad *Il.* 18.607 (van der Valk (ed.) 1971–1987: 4.272): δῆλον δὲ ὡς πάνυ δεξιῶς πινακογραφικῶ χαρακτήρι, ὃν οἱ περιηγούμενοι ἐξήλωσαν, τῇ κατ' αὐτὸν Ὅμηρος κοσμοποιία κύκλῳ τὸν Ὀκεανὸν περιέθετο; cf. Phil. Min. *Imag.* 10.20 (within Philostratus' own ring-composed textual evocation of a painting of the literary shield, which instead begins and closes with Pyrrhus and Eurypylus): ἡ δὲ δὴ ἐν κύκλῳ τῆς ἀντυγὸς θαλάσσης εἰκὼν οὐ θάλασσα, ὃ παῖ, Ὀκεανὸν δὲ νοεῖν χρὴ ὅρον εἶναι τεχνηθέντα τῆς ἐν τῷ σάκει γῆς. For the later rationalisation of the rhetorical trope, compare Hermogenes' *De Inventione*: κύκλος ἐστὶ τὸ ἀφ' ὧν ἂν ἀρξῇται τις ὀνομάτων ἢ ῥημάτων εἰς τὰ αὐτὰ καταλήγειν δύνασθαι πάλιν· τοῦτο γὰρ ἔστιν ὁ κύκλος (Rabe (ed.) 1913: 196); by opening and closing with the word κύκλος, Hermogenes' discussion of the trope nicely practises what it preaches.

<sup>60</sup> Given that Imperial rhetoricians explicitly labelled this phenomenon as κύκλος, we may ask whether it can be coincidence that the second column closes with the image at the end of its final line (ἐνὶ κύκλῳ, v. 504). The cyclical organisation of the text here emphasises the circular figure within the cyclical ecphrasis of the shield, and at the very moment when potential readers must rotate the object in their hands ...

<sup>61</sup> As I have argued in this journal, such games with order – with what rhetorical theory labelled τάξις – are a defining feature of the *Tabulae Iliacae* (Squire 2011a; cf. idem 2011b: 176–96 and forthcoming b). Indeed, one of the most famous tablets (1A) flaunted the issue explicitly, instructing its viewers to learn the 'order of Homer' (τάξιν Ὀμήρου) in its inscribed elegiac epigram.

<sup>62</sup> After hours trying to decipher the third column, I finally perceived another witticism besides: to have any chance of making out the letters, it was necessary to read the letters both from right to left *and* from left to right; at the same time, one

we proceed, moreover, the text quickly proves at odds with the pictures: although the first two columns frame a corresponding scene of the city at peace, the subsequent columns describing the city at war find themselves situated beside the landscape scenes of the lower section; conversely, in the lost, upper right-hand part of the tablet, the description of the latter landscape scenes must have revolved around the imagery of the city at war.

But there seems more to the semantics of this circle than first meets the eye. After all, what is so interesting about this arrangement is that the *anti-clockwise* layout of the textual columns proves out of sync with the *clockwise* spin of Helios and Selene [Fig. 11]. As we have said, the order of the inscribed columns plays upon the standard conventions of the papyrus scroll: like the letters themselves, columns proceed from left to right (although in this case the circular form means that the beginning and end of the text playfully meet either side of Helios [Fig. 11]). When it came to figuring Helios and Selene, however, there was much more room for artistic licence: artists could portray these figures proceeding either from left to right or from right to left. Indeed, this is reflected in the very structure of our relief: although the circular form means that both personifications are completing the same cycle, from the point of view of each metopal relief, Helios is shown proceeding from left to right [Fig. 10], whereas Selene moves from right to left [Figs. 7, 18].<sup>63</sup>

The combination of different sequential orders – with the text orbiting one way, and the imagery revolving the other – seems to me of the utmost significance: if the personifications of the ‘tireless Sun’ (ἥελιόν τ’ ἀκάμαντα) and ‘Moon at her full’ (σελήνην τε πλήθουσσαν, v. 484) chart an endless temporal course, that course is at odds with the *taxis* of the orbital text, incorporated in the same spatial field. Indeed, the positioning of these figures might even prompt readers to break ranks: as long as we recognise the written conventions (unlike the palindrome on the verso, individual lines should be read from left to right), might we not experiment with different columnar orders, moving from right to left as well as from left to right? Such games would be very much in keeping with those on other *Tabulae Iliacae*. Like the other tablets, this object too is designed not simply as a monument to Homer, but also as a challenge for those who know their Homer (as it were) backwards: whatever our knowledge of the poems, the *Tabulae* show that there is always more to see.<sup>64</sup>

To my mind, though, this is only part of the game. Put the columns of text back in regular anti-clockwise order (so as now to read them in established Homeric sequence) and something remarkable happens: the very gesture of reading the *anticlockwise* inscription restores the *clockwise* spatial circuit of Helios and Selene. Turning the object in our hands, we literally spin the sun and moon in their endless orbit. Better, perhaps, the act of reading these letters re-inscribes the element of time which the imagery (*qua* imagery) lacks: thanks to the oceanic flow of the sequential text, the object is transformed from static still to temporal animation. We might have thought that material object brought verbal imagery to visual life. We now find the opposite scenario: is it not the flow of text that animates the imagery?

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naturally finds one’s eye skipping upwards and downwards from one line of text to another. As ever with the *Tabulae Iliacae*, the games of the recto flip those of the verso (and *vice versa*) ...

<sup>63</sup> For the iconography, see *LIMC* 4.1: 592–625, s.v. ‘Helios/ Sol’ ; *ibid.* 5.1: 1005–34, s.v. ‘Helios’; *ibid.* 7.1: 706–15, s.v. ‘Selene/ Luna’.

<sup>64</sup> On related Greek systems of memory – theorised in terms not only of letters, but also of moving forwards and backwards in lettered sequence – see Squire forthcoming b on e.g. Arist. *Mem.* 452a. When it came to Homer, ancient critics hardly considered it sufficient to commit the poems to memory: as Socrates puts it, there is a difference between truly understanding Homeric thought and merely recalling the words of the poems (καὶ τὴν τούτου διάνοιαν ἐκμανθάνειν, μὴ μόνον τὰ ἔπη, Pl. *Ion* 530c); well might Niceratus know the Homeric poems ‘by heart’, as another Socratic challenge puts it, but so too do the rhapsodes, and they hardly perceived the deeper meanings (τὰς ὑπονοίας οὐκ ἐπίστανται, Xen. *Symp.* 3.6)! By at once highlighting and playing with poetic *taxis*, the *Tabulae Iliacae* prompt viewer-readers to perceive the poems differently: according to the Aristotelian concept of ‘synopsis’, the *Tabulae Iliacae* invite a mode of ‘viewing all at once’ (συνοραᾶσθαι: cf. Squire 2011b: 251–3 on Arist. *Po.* 1450b34–1451a6); at the same time, they also spur audiences into *re-viewing* the poems, thereby seeing new orders of significance. In allowing us physically to see the whole microcosmic text envisioned in *Iliad* 18, the ἄσπις Ἀχιλλεύου tablet proves no exception.

By way of conclusion, we should perhaps ask ourselves: why did the artist(s) of our tablet go to such extraordinary lengths to produce so microscopic a text? This is not the place for a full analysis of how this (or indeed any other *Tabula Iliaca*) was used.<sup>65</sup> Purely on the basis of our ‘Achilleian shield’, however, I think we can lay some of the more perfidious theories to rest: that objects like these were ‘cribs’ or prizes for schoolboys, or else vehicles for adult education (‘this clientèle was not so ignorant of Greek that it could not cope with the simple linguistic demands made by Theodorus’ texts, but its general cultural level was not high’).<sup>66</sup> We can no longer sustain the idea that such tablets were ‘tawdry gewgaws intended to provide the illusion of sophistication for those who had none’:<sup>67</sup> apart from anything else, one need only remember the tablet’s astrological markings, associating it with ancient scholarship’s allegorical modes of interpretation.<sup>68</sup>

So what *does* lie behind our tiny tablet and its even tinier text? To my mind, the ‘Achilleian shield’ was designed as a work of wonder, intended to wow its audiences through its size and visual-verbal medium. As such, the tablet connects its own games of literary and literal replication with those found in and on the Homeric ‘original’. According to Homer, Hephaestus created the shield as explicit marvel, ‘... such that anyone among the multitude of men will marvel, whoever looks upon it’ (οἷά τις αὖτε / ἀνθρώπων πολέων θαυμάσσεται, ὅς κεν ἴδῃται, 18.466–7); moreover, we find the same theme of wonder itself replicated in the scenes evoked (θαύμαζον, v. 496; θαῦμα, v. 549).<sup>69</sup> Of course, one of the wonders of Hephaestus’ object is its size, crafted for the superhuman hero: it is a ‘great and mighty shield’ (σάκος μέγα τε στιβαρόν τε, vv. 478, 609), made using twenty bellows (v. 470), a ‘great anvil’ (v. 476) and an ‘almighty hammer’ (v. 477). At 17.8 cm in diameter, by contrast, our tablet is a wonder at the opposite extreme: its scale made epic heroes out of its everyday viewers [Fig. 2].

Allow me to end with a first-century writer who may well have appreciated the game. Tendering an implicit comparison between the Homeric ecphrasis of the shield and his own lettered description of his ‘Tuscan’ villa, the Younger Pliny indulges in a long digression about the semantics of size (*Ep.* 5.6.43–4).<sup>70</sup> Just like its imitation by Vergil, writes Pliny, the wonder of Homer’s shield lies in its paradoxical combination of the little and the large. *Vides quot uersibus Homerus, quot Vergilius arma hic Aeneae Achillis ille describat; brevis tamen uterque est quia facit quod instituit*: for all the ecphrasis’ semblance of brevity, just *look* at its number of lines! The little and large text around our tablet works in a related way. Here, though, the spatial span of the Homeric inscription is literally reduced to minuscule visual proportions, wrapped around the image of the materialised text. True to Pliny’s prescription, the text is *both* readable and seeable, and *both* big *and* small. By anyone’s measure, a wonder indeed.

<sup>65</sup> There are some further comments in Squire 2011b: 67–86, along with idem 2011a: 69–70.

<sup>66</sup> The quotation comes from Horsfall 1979: 34. Elsewhere Horsfall concludes that the ‘serious lover of Greek literature would have been appalled by such a combination of the obvious, the trivial and the false’, just as ‘the serious lover of art cannot have derived much pleasure from pictures so tiny that the sculptor could add little if anything of his own interpretations and emotions’ (1994: 79). Horsfall defends his interpretation in idem (ed.) 2008: 587–91.

<sup>67</sup> McLeod 1985: 164. Like many others in the nineteenth century, but unlike the vast majority of scholars in the twentieth and early twenty-first, Bienkowski concludes otherwise: ‘A mio avviso tutto questo genere di piccole sculture è nato dalle scherzose esercitazioni artistico-letterarie dell’epoca ellenistica e greco-romana per quel capriccioso gusto che dovette esserle particolare di riprodurre tutta la serie delle favole troiane e simili sopra ristrettissimo spazio e in lavori accessibili a qualsiasi prezzo, senza perciò prefiggersi lo scopo di un determinato risultato pratico’ (1891: 201). Nicholas Horsfall, by contrast, admits that ‘the Gelehrsamkeit of the inscriptions is intermittently distinctive’ (1979: 33), and notes that the miniature writing on our tablet is ‘a remarkable tour de force’ (idem 1994: 79), but nonetheless maintains that such ‘flickering Gelehrsamkeit ... [is] regularly put to trivial and bizarre uses’ (idem 1979: 29); for the scholarly history here, and the ideology behind such dismissals, cf. Squire 2011b: 87–103.

<sup>68</sup> As Amedick rightly concludes, the tablet clearly derives from ‘einem Zentrum der hellenistischen Gelehrsamkeit’ (1999: 206) – although I do not think it can necessarily be said to ‘copy’ a second-century prototype (cf. Squire 2011b: 63, 305 n. 3).

<sup>69</sup> For the Homeric *mise-en-abîme* and its programmatic significance, see Becker 1995: 109–10, 128–30, and Squire forthcoming a.

<sup>70</sup> On the passage, see Henderson 2002: 18–20 and Chinn 2007: esp. 269–70, 276–8.

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LIMC = *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*. 1981–1997. Zurich and Munich.

PPM = G. Pugliese Carratelli (ed.), *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*. 1990–2003. Rome.

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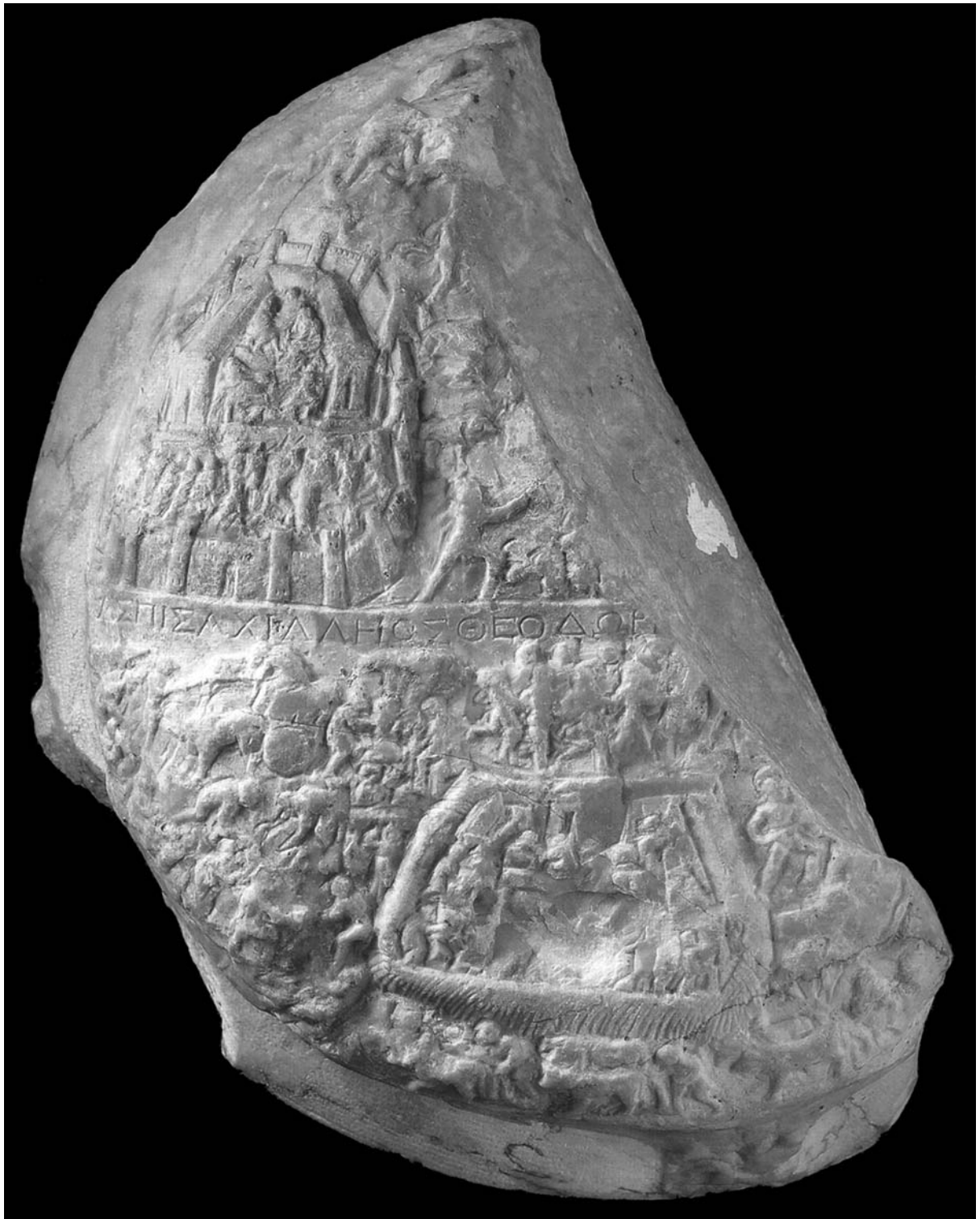


Fig. 1. Obverse of the *Aspis Achillēos* tablet (Sala delle Colombe 83a, Musei Capitolini, Rome).  
Author, reproduced by kind permission of the Direzione, Musei Capitolini, Rome



Fig. 2. Plaster cast of the same tablet, held in the author's left hand (Archäologisches Institut und Sammlung der Gipsabgüsse, Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen, A1695). – Author



Fig. 3. Reverse of the Göttingen cast. – Author



Fig. 4. Drawing and reconstruction of the tablet's reverse.  
After Bienkowski 1891: Tav. V



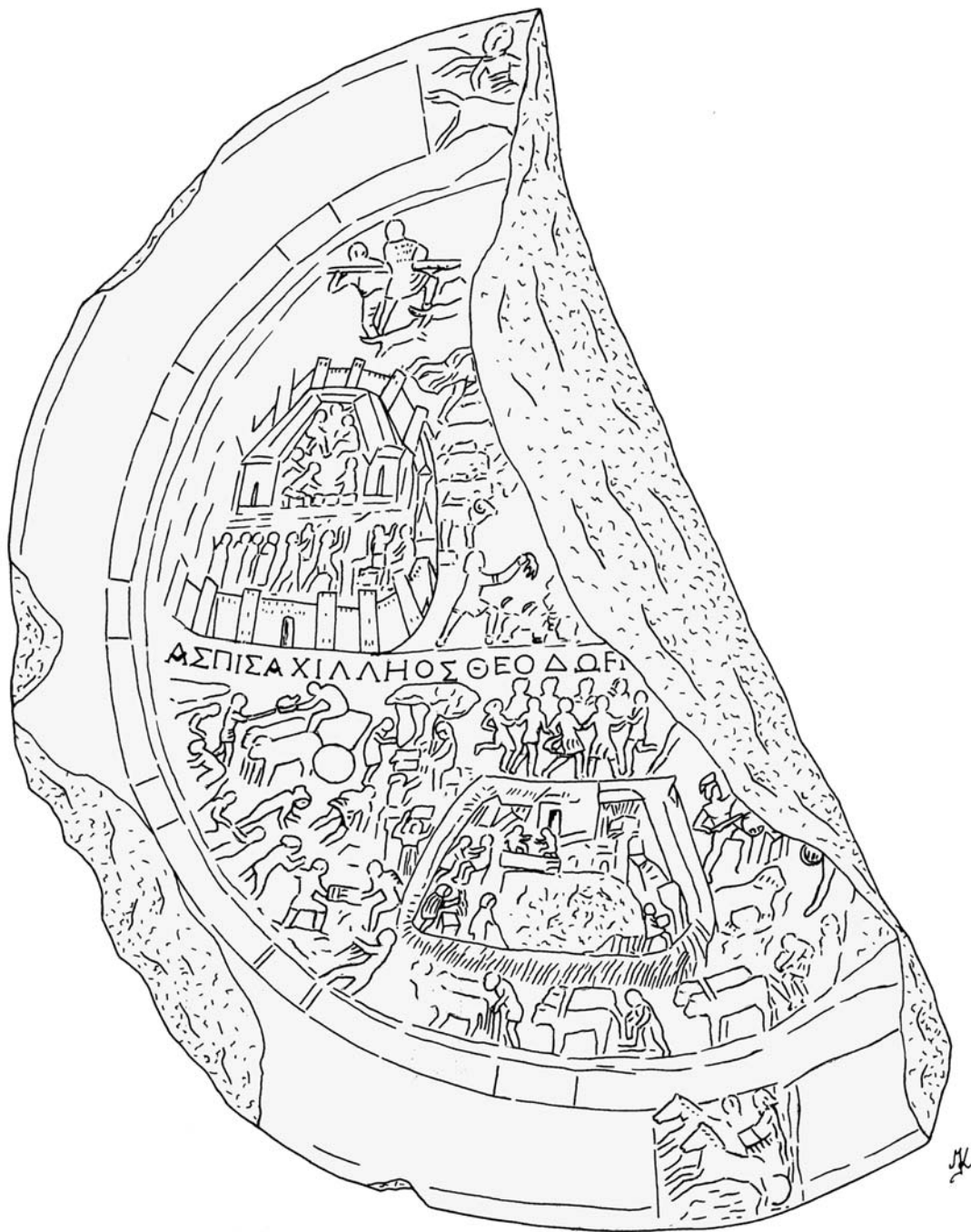


Fig. 5. Drawing of the tablet's obverse (by Margitta Krause, commissioned by Rita Amedick, published 1999).  
 After Amedick 1999: 166, Abb. 5. Reproduced by kind permission of Rita Amedick

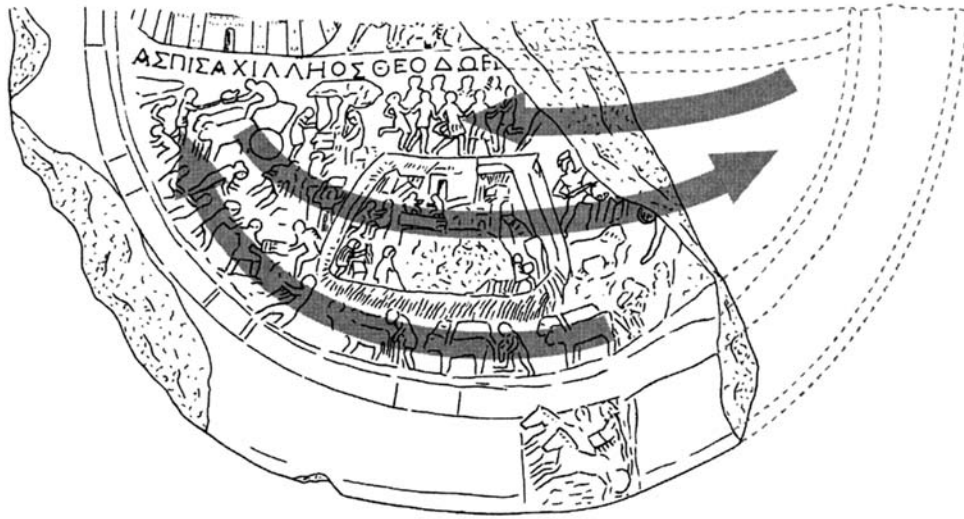


Fig. 6. Drawing showing the arrangement of Homeric landscape scenes on the lower obverse.  
Author, adapted from Fig. 5



Fig. 7. Obverse of the original tablet in Rome, as seen from the bottom up, showing Selene (to the right of the outer frieze) and the oblique band for astronomical markings. – Author

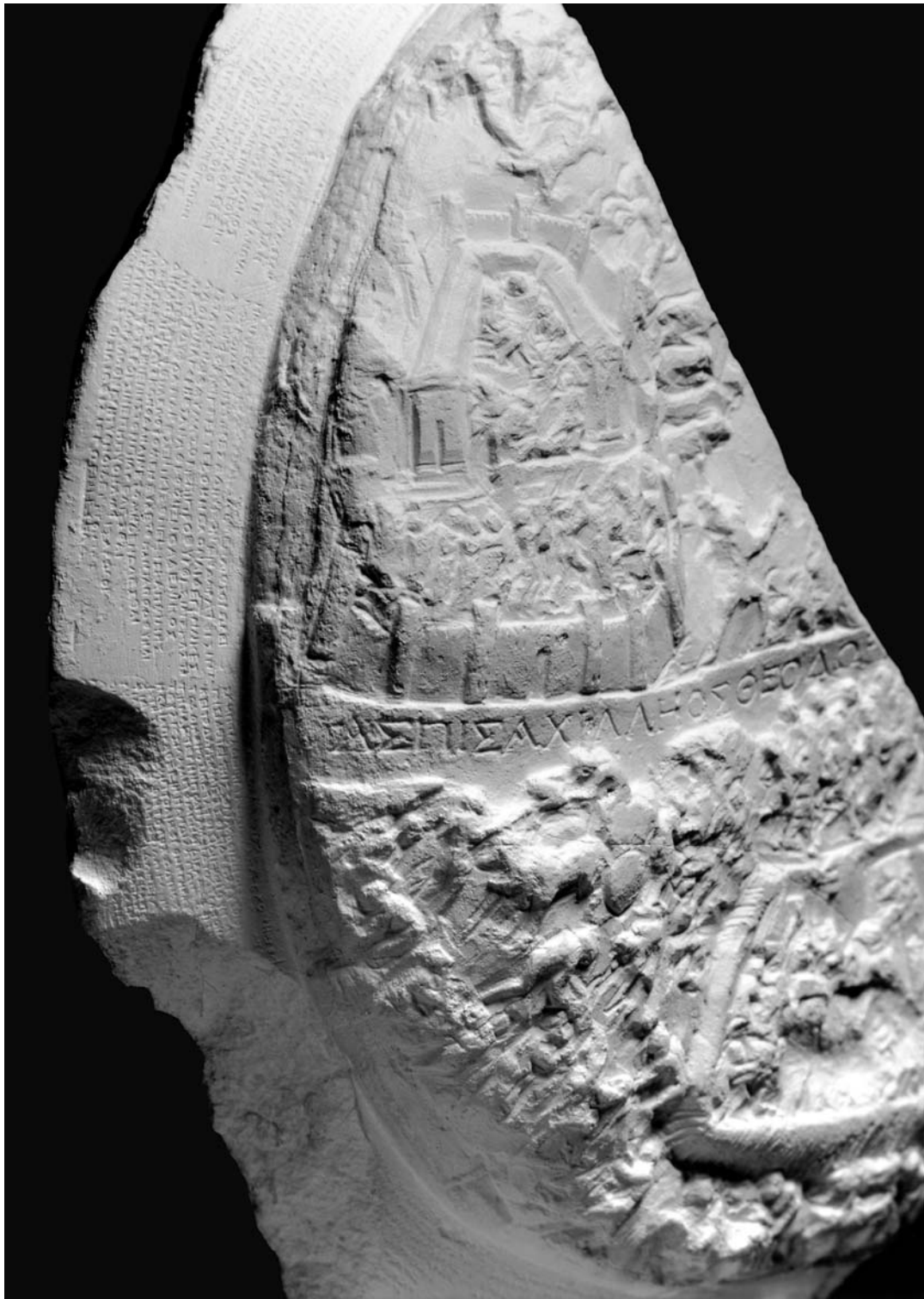


Fig. 8. Obverse outer rim of the Göttingen cast, showing the first three columns of text.  
Photograph by Stefan Eckardt, reproduced by kind permission

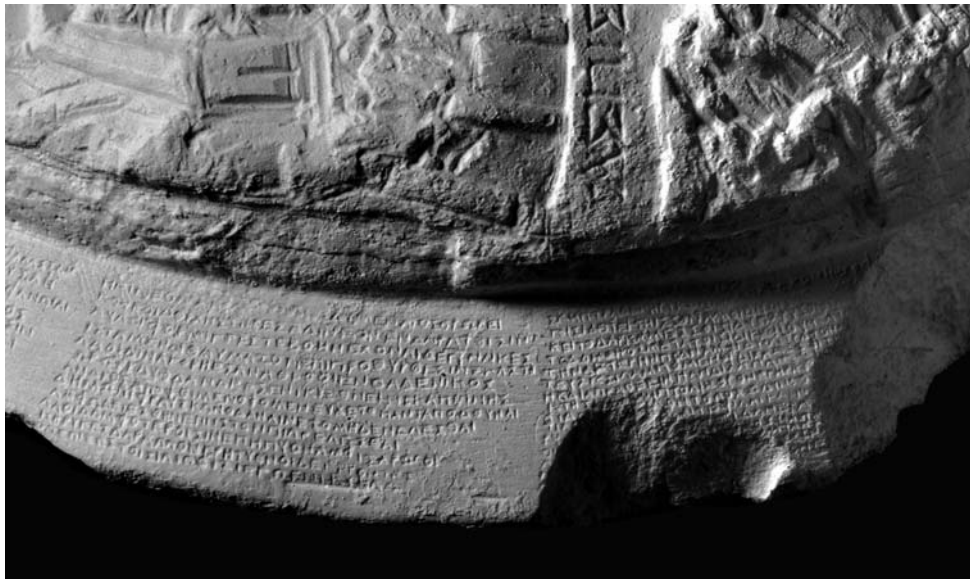


Fig. 9. Detail of the Göttingen cast, showing the second and third columns, as well as the edge of the first. Photograph by Stefan Eckardt, reproduced by kind permission

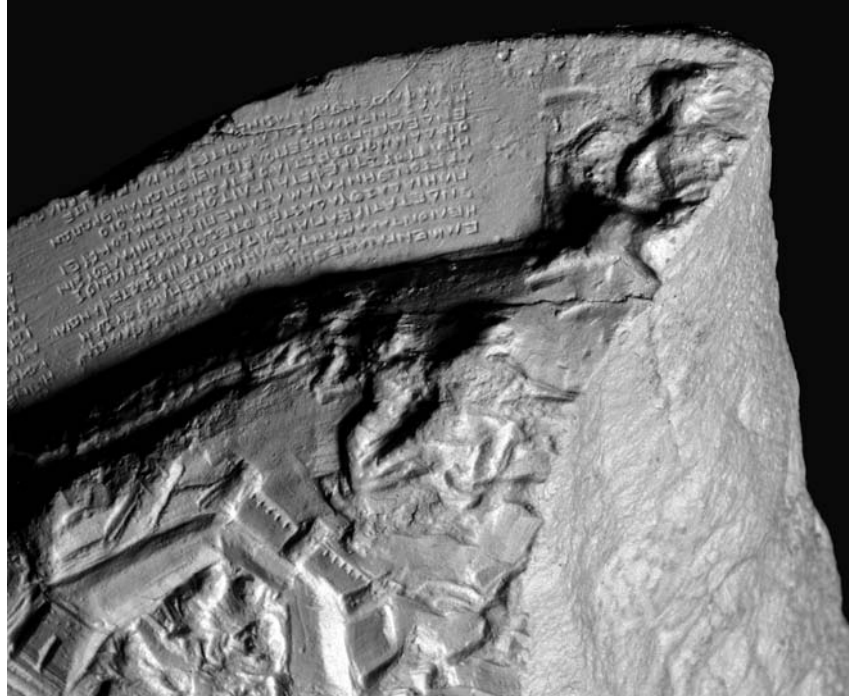


Fig. 10. Detail of the Göttingen cast, showing the first and edge of the second columns of text. – Author



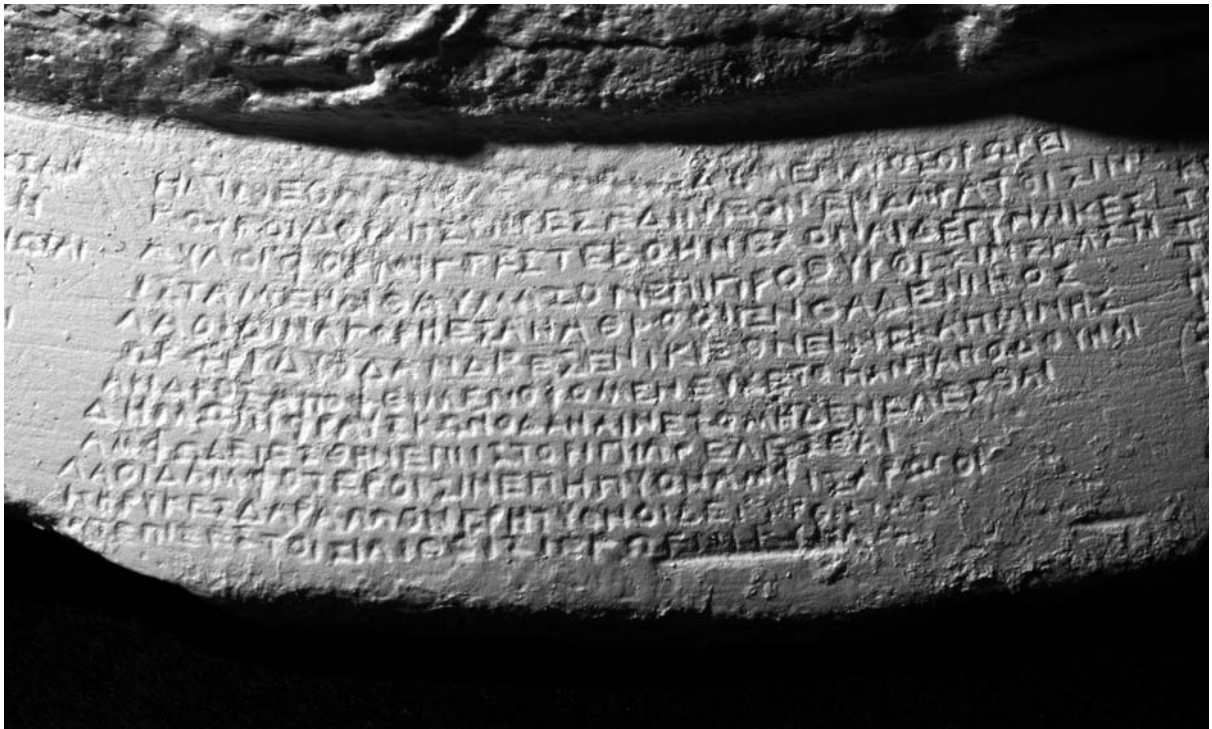


Fig. 13. Detail of the Göttingen cast, showing the second column.  
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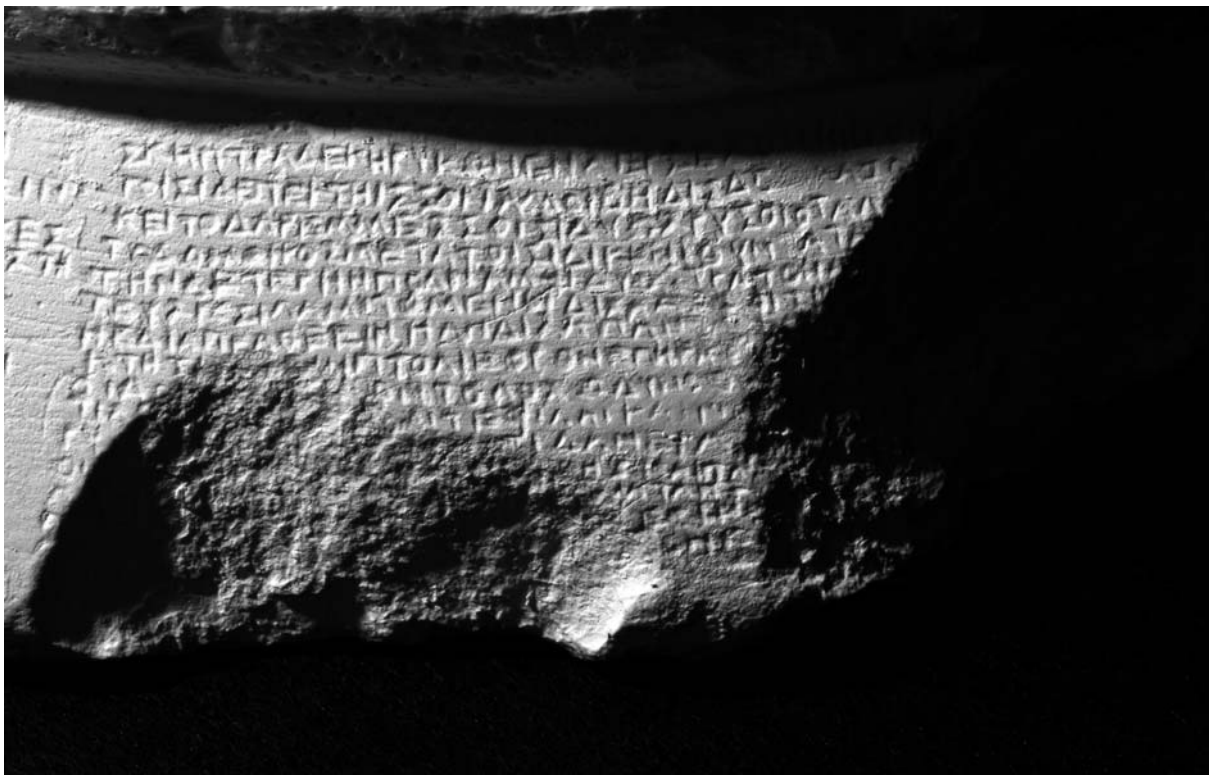


Fig. 14. Detail of the Göttingen cast, showing the third column.  
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Fig. 15. Detail of the Göttingen cast, showing the fourth column.  
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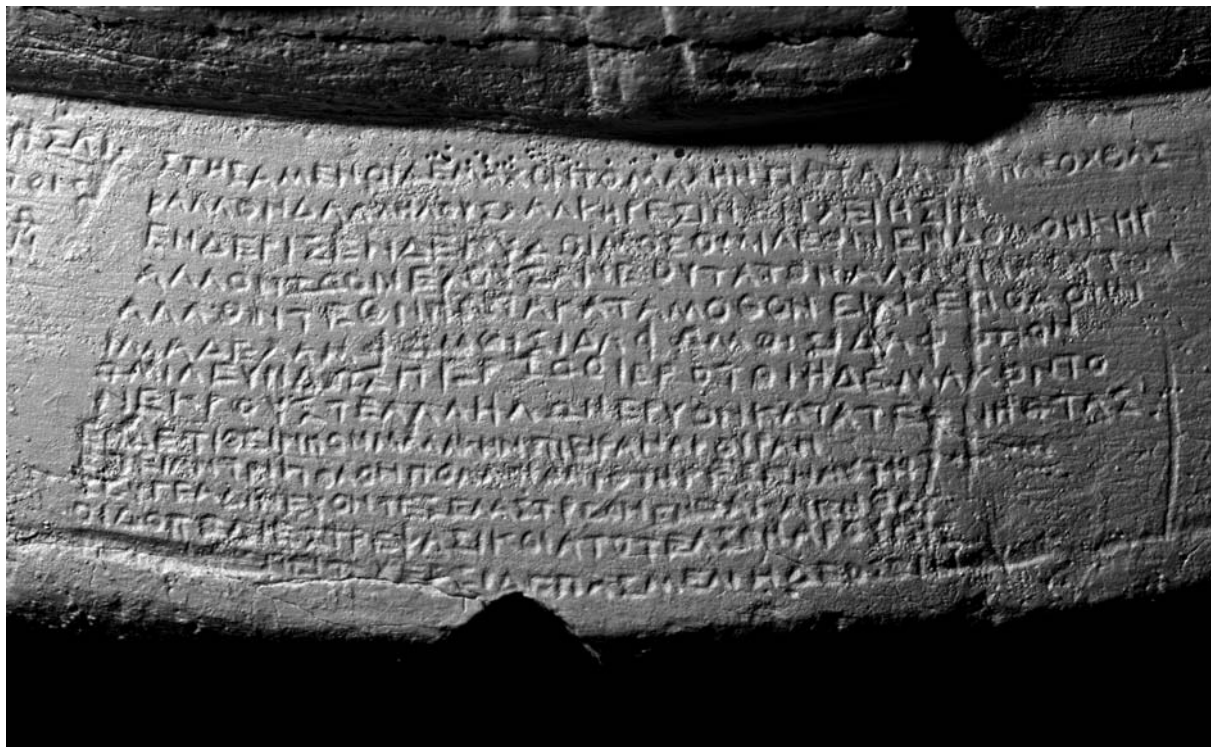


Fig. 16. Detail of the Göttingen cast, showing the fifth column.  
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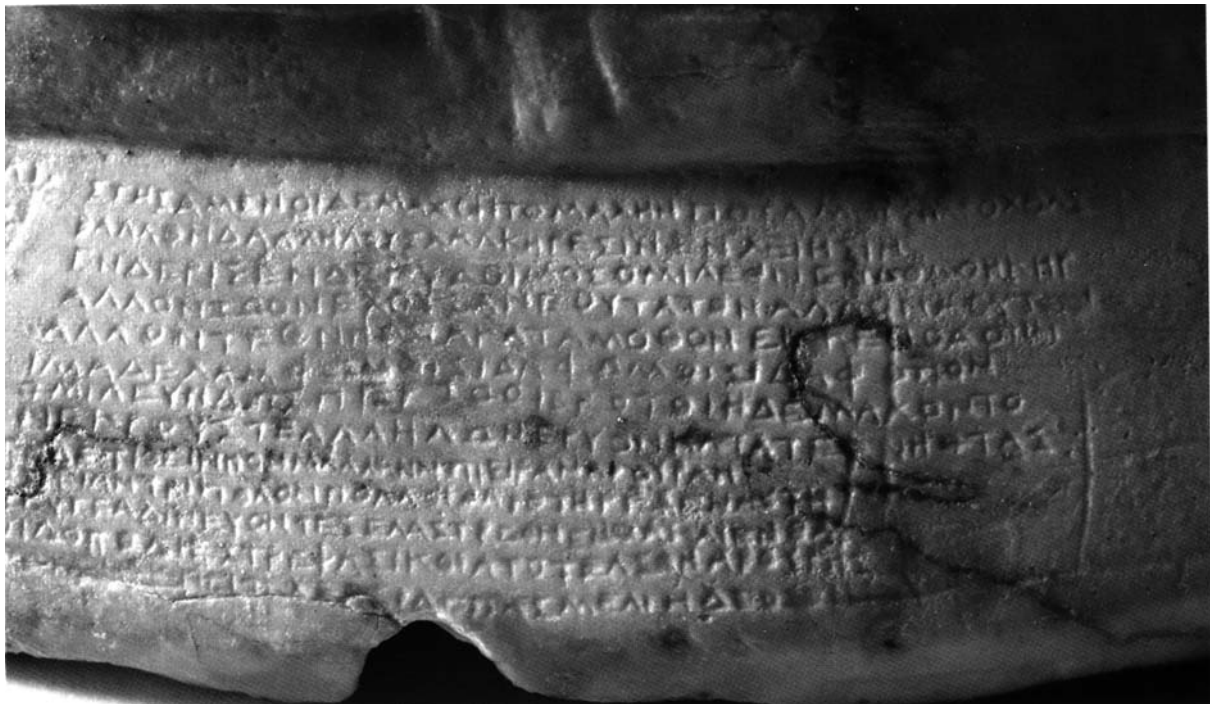


Fig. 17. Detail of the original tablet in Rome, showing the same fifth column. – Author

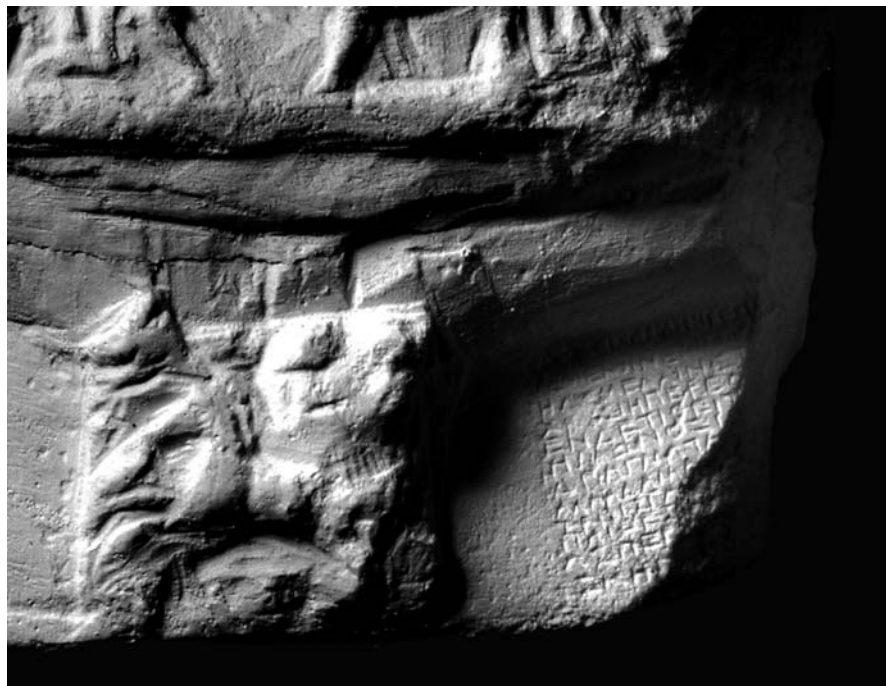


Fig. 18. Detail of the Göttingen cast, showing the figure of Selene and the sixth column.  
Author



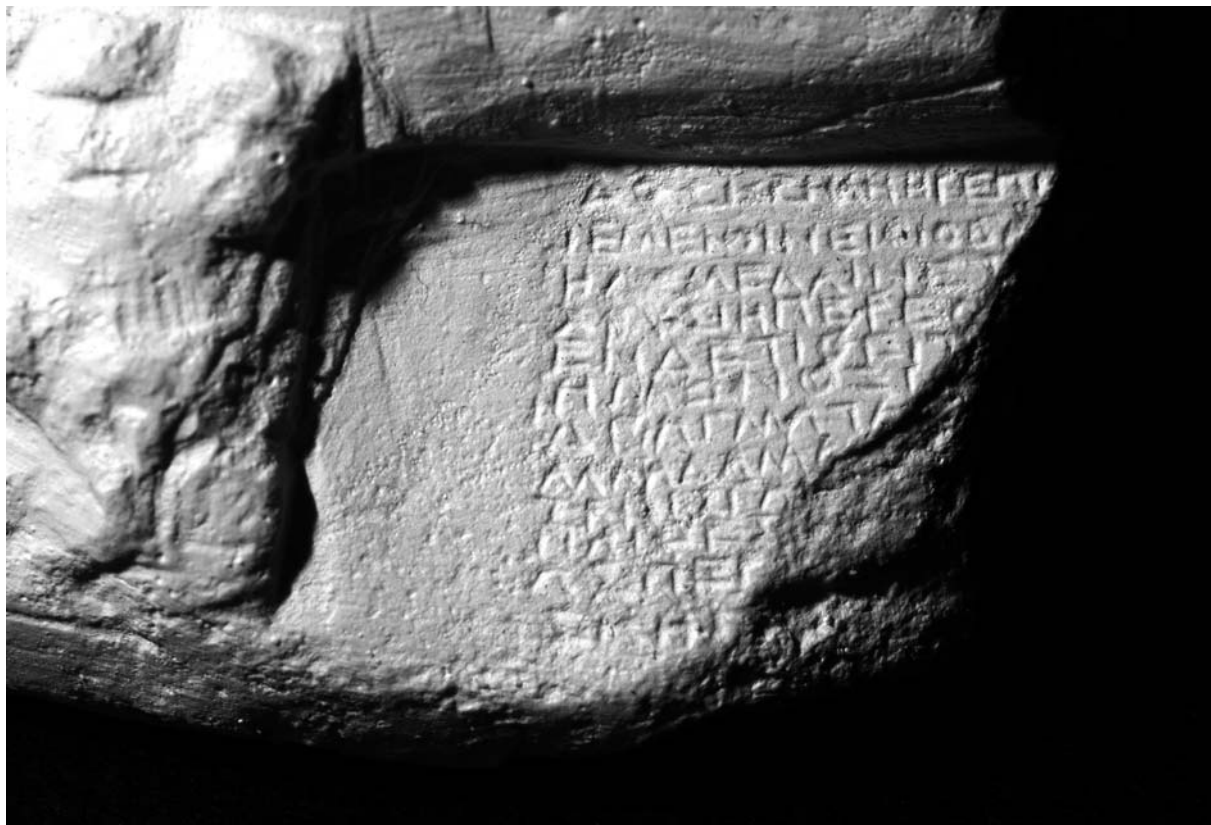


Fig. 19. Detail of the Göttingen cast, showing the sixth column.  
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